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September 16, 1981.

Dear Reader:

From time to time, all magazines try new cover concepts in an effort to please long-time readers and to attract new ones. And so the covers of our April 1, April 29, and May 27 issues, for the first time in the history of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, did not feature the image of Alfred Hitchcock. But our readers quickly told us, in no uncertain terms, to put him back where he belongs, and so he was promptly returned to our cover starting with the June 24 issue.

And there, on all future issues of *AHMM*, we promise you he will remain. We know you will applaud that decision as you've always applauded Mr. Hitchcock on the silver screen and on the home screen—and as we hope you will continue to applaud, as you do in your kind letters, the stories we bring you in each new issue.

Good reading.

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Homicide, the medical examiner reminded the sergeant, is illegal in Chicago . . .

HIT AND RUN

by
**CLARK
HOWARD**



The body was found sixty feet up an alley behind the Midwest Athletic Club, on the West Side of Chicago. Ironically, it was lying up against the back wall of a hospital that fronted the next street over. Rubino, the Homicide sergeant from the Twelfth Street station, found definite signs that the body had been dragged from the mouth of the alley to where it was found.

"What killed him?" he asked Grimes, the assistant medical examiner assigned to the morgue wagon.

"He was stomped to death by a gorilla," Grimes said.

"Cute," Rubino remarked. "Does the coroner know you say funny things like that about poor unfortunate homicide victims?"

"Sure. All my witty sayings are straight from the coroner's handbook." Grimes rose from where he had been kneeling beside the corpse. "All I know so far is that the man's got contusions all over his body. I've noted them on his face, neck, upper torso, and calves. I assume when I get him downtown and strip him I'll find similar marks on the rest of his body. But as for the cause of death I wouldn't even guess until I can cut him open and see what he looks like inside. O.K.?"

"Sure. But do you think a good educated guess might be that he was dragged by a car from the street down to here?"

Grimes looked down the alley, glanced at the corpse again, and shrugged. "Very possible," he allowed.

Rubino turned to another detective. "Radio the lab and have them send out a team. And tell the uniforms to rope off the alley at both ends. If this was a hit and run, maybe we can get some tire tracks or something." He looked back at Grimes, said, "Thanks, Doc," and started to walk away.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" Grimes said. Rubino turned back, frowning. "The Jackson-Handley fight last night," Grimes reminded him. "We had a small wager."

"Oh, yeah," Rubino said, disgruntled. He took a five-dollar bill from his pocket and handed it to Grimes. "You do realize that gambling is illegal in this city, don't you?"

"So's homicide," said Grimes. "Get to work."

The Jackson-Handley heavyweight fight the previous night had been matched three weeks earlier. Dave Handley, one of the contestants, had alighted from a city bus just one block from where the homicide victim had been found and crossed the street to enter the Midwest Athletic Club. Dave had on an old leather jacket that was worn and cracked in places and a folded-up *Sun-Times* was sticking out of his pocket. He looked anything but prosperous as he ignored the elevator and took the stairs two at a time up to the second floor. On the way he passed a couple of palookas.

"Hey, Dave, you doing your roadwork?" one of them yelled. Handley waved at them without answering.

Upstairs, he entered a large open gymnasium. It was crowded and noisy. Fighters were sparring in the two training rings; others were shadow-boxing in front of full-length mirrors, working on speed bags, jumping rope. Lounging on a row of wooden bleachers against one wall were a dozen spectators. There was a peculiar smell in the air: sweat and cigar smoke.

Dave began threading his way down the length of the room. As he moved along he was greeted here and there by various fighters and trainers.

"Hey, Davey-boy, howareya?"

"Dave, long time no see—"

"Big Dave, whatdayaknow, whatdayasay?"

Dave returned each greeting with a word, a wave, a friendly punch. Gradually he made his way back to a door marked PRIVATE. He started to enter, then paused and looked over at a fighter in his early twenties, some ten years younger than himself. The fighter was lean and muscular and was doing strenuous sit-ups with his feet elevated. For a brief, suspended moment as he watched the younger man, Dave's expression became wistful, melancholy, as if he were remembering.

After a moment Dave went through the door into a small, seedy reception room containing half a dozen wooden chairs, a table littered with old copies of *Ring* magazine, and some empty pop bottles in a butt can. At a desk next to the inner-office door sat a thin, harried-looking woman wearing a print dress just a touch too large for her skinny frame. She had a nervous habit of constantly checking the top button of her blouse. "Yes, may I help you?" she asked.

"Leo sent word he wanted to see me," Dave said.

"What's your name, please?"

"Joe Louis."

"Just a minute, Mr. Louis." She went into the inner office, then returned a moment later. "You may go in, Mr. Louis."

At a hopelessly cluttered desk in the office sat Leo Marvel, a partly bald, chain-smoking fight promoter who never smiled. Next to his desk was a large cardboard box containing a shaggy alley cat nursing five tiny kittens. Marvel looked up at Dave with a scowl.

"You a wise guy or something, Handley, with the Joe Louis stuff? It's

hard enough to keep a secretary around this snake pit without guys like you putting her on."

Dave sat down, bobbing his chin at the kittens. "I see you're a family man now."

"That ain't funny, Dave," Leo said somberly. "I been a family man all my life. I don't have to bring in no alley cat for a family."

"Sorry," Dave said contritely. "I didn't mean it like a crack."

"The cat didn't have no place else to go. I couldn't let it have kittens in the alley, could I?"

"'Course not. That was nice of you, Leo. What'd you want to see me about?"

"What are you doing now? You working?" As he spoke, Leo rose and came around the desk.

"I'm unloading trucks in the warehouses over on Roosevelt Road."

Leo stood in front of him and examined a furrow of scar tissue under one eyebrow. "That's day work, ain't it?"

Dave shrugged self-consciously. "Yeah, kind of. I mean, you got to be hired every morning just like on the docks, but if you're steady they get to know you. I get on most every day."

Leo fingered Dave's nose where it had been broken twice, and felt some thickening in the cartilage of his right ear. "Day work is still day work," he declared. "It's for winos, junkies, and hoboes."

"Sure, O.K." Dave said, pushing Marvel's hand away. "Look, what do you want, Leo?"

"How long since you had a fight?" the promoter asked, returning to his chair.

"A year ago August. Why?"

"Fourteen months," Leo said reflectively, pursing his lips. "What do you weigh?"

"Two-ten, two-twelve. Why?"

"Can you get down to one-ninety-five in three weeks?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Lester Jackson, that's why. The black kid that won the gold medal in the Pan American Games last summer—and would have won the same thing in the Olympics if we'd sent a team to Moscow. He's making his pro debut on a card I'm putting together at the Stadium in three weeks. I need a good trial horse to throw in with him."

"Why me?" Dave asked.

"Two reasons. One, you're white. Two, he can take you."

"What makes you so sure?"

"That he can take you?"

"No, Leo, that I'm white," Dave said sarcastically.

"Wise guy. He can take you because you're a sucker for a scientific left. That's why you're 42-and-18. This kid's got the classiest left since Ray Robinson." Leo leaned forward and folded his hands on the cluttered desk. "The match'll be six rounds. The TV people are gonna televise the main go plus Jackson's debut. I'll give you fifteen hundred."

"If I take him, will you throw some steady work my way?"

"You won't take him, believe me. You want the slot or don't you?"

"Yeah, sure I want it."

"Fine. I'll have the contracts drawn up tomorrow for the State Athletic Commission. And I'll open up a locker for you. Start training." Leo took a roll from his pocket and peeled off some bills. "Two hundred now, the rest after."

Handley took the money and left. On his way out of the gym, he pulled the *Sun-Times* from his back pocket. It was folded to the Help Wanted ads. Some of them were circled in pencil. Without looking at them, Dave threw the paper in a trash can.

Down in the West Side tenderloin, in a large old-fashioned poolhall, Dave found a pale pink-eyed mulatto named, appropriately, Pink. He was lounging on a bench, watching two punks trying to out-hustle each other at nine-ball. Dave sat down beside him. "Hey, Pink, how goes it?"

"Dave!" Pink said with a smile. "I ain't seen you in months!"

"I been like semi-retired," Dave said. "Waiting for the right match to come along, you know?"

"Yeah," said Pink, "that's about what I been doing too: waiting for something to come along."

"Listen, I got a fight lined up. I need some stuff to work with. You still got all your training gear?"

"Yeah, sure." Pink's expression turned eager. "Who you matched with?"

"Lester Jackson."

Pink's eyebrows went up. "That kid from the Pan Am Games? He's dynamite, Dave."

Handley shrugged. "I think I can take him. What about the gear? I'll

pay you a hundred to let me use it for three weeks. And fifty a week for you to train me. Deal?"

"Deal," Pink quickly agreed.

"Meet me at the gym at nine tomorrow." Dave glanced at a clock on the wall. "Got to run, man."

He rode a bus back to the neighborhood where he lived, and went into a large supermarket on the corner. Going down one of the aisles, he took a cellophane package from a shelf, then went to a table filled with small potted plants and selected one. Paying for his purchases, he hurried down the street to a shabby four-story greystone building and ran up to the third floor rear where he lived. As soon as he got inside the door, a woman's voice said, "Dave? Did you remember to stop at the store for bread?"

Handley hit himself lightly on the forehead with the heel of his hand. He walked into the kitchen.

"Dave—?" Dora, his wife, was a year older than Dave—35—but she looked 40. Her hair was long and fine, already grey-streaked. There was a worn, dissatisfied look about her, as if she constantly waged long struggles for things she never got.

As Dave came in, Dora glanced at the grocery bag in his hand and said, "You remembered the bread. Good."

"I didn't remember the bread," Dave said. "I'm sorry."

"What's that then?" she asked.

Dave pulled out the cellophane package. "Marshmallow cookies. Your favorite kind." Then he pulled out the little plant. "And this."

Dora smiled a wide smile. "You got a job!"

"Yeah. Well, sort of."

Dora's smile contracted. "What do you mean, sort of?"

"Look, I don't want you to get upset, but Leo Marvel sent word around this morning that he wanted to see me—"

"You went to the gym?" Dora said tightly. "Instead of looking for a job?"

"Just to see what he wanted, honey."

Dora put the cookies and plant on the table and pushed them away from her as if they were contaminated. "You promised me, Dave," she said. "You swore to me. You said if I came back to you you'd give it up for good. Did you take a fight?"

"No, I didn't take no fight," Dave lied. "I just said I'd consider one. I wanted to talk it over with you first."

"There's nothing to talk over. We're getting along fine without you fighting."

"Yeah, we sure are," Dave said, looking around the shabby little apartment.

"Things will improve once you get a steady job."

"Yeah, well what if I *can't* get a steady job?"

"Then we'll have to make it the way we're doing now. I'll be getting a raise at the laundry soon, and with what you make at the loading dock—"

"I'm sick of the loading dock, Dora," he snapped. "You know what the loading dock job is? Day work, that's what! It's for winos and junkies and hoboos. I'm no bum, Dora."

"You're an over-the-hill fighter, Dave," she snapped back. "That's the same thing!"

For a moment they faced each other in a strange silence that saturated the room. Their eyes locked in a kind of unyielding defiance. Dora, as usual, turned out to be the stronger of the two and Dave looked away first. Then suspicion clouded Dora's face.

"You did say you just *talked* about a fight today, didn't you?"

"Yeah, that's all," Dave lied again.

As he spoke, almost as if in punishment for his second lie, there was a loud knock at the door. Dora stepped into the other room and opened the door. It was Pink.

"Dora, listen," he said, "tell Dave I'll be a little late at the gym in the morning. I got to stop at a shoe shop and get a chin strap sewed on the headgear he's gonna be using—"

"Pink!" Dave said urgently, coming in quickly from the kitchen, but it was too late—Dora had turned to face him, hurt and anger in her expression. After a moment she shook her head: a combination of helplessness, frustration, defeat. She went over to the couch where she had earlier left her coat and purse. She put the coat on, picked up the purse.

"I'll be at my sister's," she said tightly. "I'll get my things later."

"Come on, Dorry," Dave pleaded.

She ignored him and walked out. Dave leaned desolately against the wall. Pink, embarrassed, took a tentative step into the room.

"Hey, man, I'm sorry. I didn't know I was saying anything wrong."

"It's not your fault, Pink," said Handley. "It's mine." He grunted softly

and held up his right fist. "I guess it's always been my fault," he added quietly, looking at his closed fist.

The day after Dora left him, Dave Handley began training. In exercise pants, sweatshirt, and ring shoes, he worked out in a corner of the Midwest Gym, with Pink helping him. As he was jumping rope that first day, there was some commotion at the front end of the gym. Dave and Pink looked over and saw a crowd gathering. A tall, smiling young black man had just come in, accompanied by two older white men. It was Lester Jackson, the Pan American Games champion.

"Well, there he is," Pink said.

"Yeah." Handley danced around a bit to keep warm. As he moved he continued to watch the front of the gym. He studied Jackson: a wide brilliant smile in a dark face, full head of neatly trimmed hair, an obviously expensive vested suit and sport shirt, everything first-class. There was a sad envy in Handley's face as he watched the young man lead the crowd into the locker room.

Pink saw him watching and slapped him smartly on the shoulder. "Two hands, Davey, just like everybody else," he said matter-of-factly.

"Yeah. Two hands."

"The way I figure it," Pink said, "the kid's going to try to stick you to death. He's fast, so he'll hit and run, hit and run. What you got to do is cut off the ring on him, slow him down, and throw strong counter-punches, follow me? You can handle his hit-and-run tactics, Davey."

"Yeah, sure. I can handle him."

Resolutely, Handley resumed his workout.

At home that night Handley was lying on the couch reading the latest issue of *Ring*. On the floor beside him was a TV dinner tray and an empty milk glass. He had his stockinged feet propped up on the couch. On a table behind the couch a small radio was playing softly. Presently a voice said, "The time at WGN-Chicago is 8:00 P.M. In a moment, WGN's News on the Hour—"

Handley reached over and turned off the radio. He tossed the magazine onto the floor and rested his head back to stare up at the dirty grey ceiling. Unconsciously, he moved a hand to his mouth and began to chew his nails. Suddenly there was the sound of someone trying to unlock the apartment door. Handley's face lit up with anticipation. He quickly got

up and hurried to the door. Jerking it open, he found a black woman with a large bag of groceries.

"Will you just look at me, Mr. Handley!" she exclaimed. "Trying to get in the wrong apartment. Bet you thought it was your wife, didn't you?"

Handley forced a weak grin. "Yeah, I did, Mrs. Little. Here, let me take that bag for you."

He carried the groceries down the hall for the woman and waited while she opened her own apartment door. Then he walked listlessly back to his own place. He stood in the middle of the room for a long moment, indecision etched on his face. Then, as he decided what he was going to do, his expression became set. He quickly put on his shoes, grabbed his ancient leather jacket, and left the apartment.

Outside, Dave jogged down the dark street and crossed to a cigar store that had an outside phone booth. He got out a dime, then had to search through a worn, cluttered wallet for a scrap of paper that had on it the number he wanted. He dialed the number. Presently there was an answer.

"Laverne? Yeah, this is Dave. Say, is Dorry over there? Could I talk to her, please? What? Yeah, I know that, Laverne. Yeah, I know that too. Look, would you mind just asking her if she'll talk to me?"

He waited, looking slightly disgusted in the dim light of the booth. Folding the scrap of paper several times, he tapped it irritably on the ledge beneath the phone. Then his face brightened.

"Yeah, Dorry? Hi, honey. How are you? Me? I'm O.K., I guess. Kind of lonesome. You know I don't like to stay by myself, Dor."

He looked down at the floor of the booth, listening. His expression was like that of a child being chastised.

"Dorry, I didn't mean to lie to you, honest. I was going to work up to telling you, but all of a sudden you backed me into a corner, you know. I couldn't think of nothing else to do but say I didn't take the fight. What? No, I know that's no excuse, Dor. I ain't trying to make no excuses. What? What'd I call for? Well, I wanted to say I was sorry and—"

Again he listened, frowning.

"The fight? Sure; it's still on. But listen, Dorry, I seen this guy I'm fighting and he don't really look all that tough. Even Pink says all's he's got is two hands. Huh?"

Now he listened for a long time—patiently at first, nodding in agree-

ment at what his estranged wife was saying, then shrugging a couple of times as if helpless in the face of her verbal onslaught, and finally growing impatient with it all and beginning to tap restlessly with the folded scrap of paper again. When he spoke again, it was with a tone of resignation and defeat.

"All's I know, Dor, is that if you *wanted* to come back to me, you could. Nothing's holding you over there, except maybe Laverne, and we both know how she feels about me. What? No, I ain't saying nothing about your sister. Yeah, I know she's only looking out for your best interests. Yeah, Yeah. O.K. Sure—"

His voice trailed off until finally he was simply nodding at the receiver. Then he leaned forward and put his head against the glass of the booth. He stood like that for a moment, a picture of frustration. When it became obvious that there was no longer a voice at the other end of the line, he slowly hung up the phone.

Stepping out of the booth, he zipped his jacket up to the throat, shoved his hands into its pockets, and walked like a whipped dog down the dark and lonely side street.

In the gym, Dave Handley began working like a man possessed. The speed bag. Heavy bag. Medicine ball. Sit-ups. The rope. He wore a sweatshirt under a tee-shirt under a sleeveless jersey and the perspiration of his workout made a dark wet spot through all three. Gradually his weight dropped: 208 down to 204, to 201, to 198. He began to harden.

Pink was constantly with him, holding a wet sponge to douse him, keeping time when he sparred, rubbing his upper arms to keep the muscles loose. When Pink thought he had worked out enough, he'd say, "Come on, Davey, knock off. You keep up this pace you'll kill yourself."

But Handley would shake his head no. He kept at it: working, working, working. Hangers-on in the gym began to notice him. Other fighters commented that they'd never seen him work so hard. It worried Pink.

"Dave, ain't you afraid you'll peak out? Get your edge too soon?"

Handley shook his head. "It's O.K., Pink. It's O.K. I ain't trained in a long time. Feels good, man. Feels good."

He worked every day until Lester Jackson came in to train. Then, while the young gold-medal winner hung up his tailored suit and silk shirt, put on his new training leather and new satin, Dave, over in a corner of the locker room, stripped off his faded cottons and scuffed old protector

harness, and got out his plain corduroy trousers and flannel shirt to put on after he showered. He and Jackson took note of each other every day, but they didn't speak. As the days passed, Handley grew noticeably quieter and more subdued.

While working out one morning, Handley was tapped on the shoulder by Pink, who bobbed his chin toward the front of the gym. An older man had just entered: about 60 and impeccably tailored in a fine cashmere topcoat and beaver fedora. He was Mr. Jake, the czar of illegal gambling on the West Side. Accompanying him was a man about Handley's age, with a countenance as tough as Handley's but without the scar tissue; he was also nicely dressed, with an air of hard confidence about him. His name was Eddie.

"Ain't that your pal from the old neighborhood?" Pink asked.

"Eddie, yeah," Handley answered.

"I see he's still a strongarm for Mr. Jake."

Handley shrugged. "Yeah, well, it pays good, I guess."

"You gonna say hello to him?"

"Aw, I don't think so. We ain't seen each other in a while. Besides, when he's with the man, he's like working, you know?"

Pink nodded and watched Mr. Jake and Eddie walk back to Leo Marvel's office.

In his office, Leo Marvel was looking at a freshly printed fight poster. It was black-and-red on white stock and read:

CHICAGO STADIUM—OCTOBER 23—8:30 P.M.—MARVEL ENTERPRISES PRESENTS—30 ROUNDS OF BOXING—MAIN EVENT—HEAVYWEIGHTS—CHARLEY NEAL VS. WILLIE EDWARDS—10 ROUNDS—SPECIAL BOUT: LESTER JACKSON, PAN AMERICAN GAMES CHAMPION, PRO DEBUT VS. DAVE HANDLEY, FORMER CONTENDER—HEAVYWEIGHTS—6 ROUNDS.

"Very nice, Leo," said Mr. Jake, noting the poster as he entered the office.

"Oh, Mr. Jake," Leo said anxiously, jumping up. "I didn't see you come in. Here, take my chair, please."

"Thank you, Leo," said the older man. He sat behind the desk while Leo took one of the wooden chairs. Eddie stood idly by the door; Leo could feel him at his back.

Mr. Jake put on a pair of silver-rimmed glasses and studied the poster more closely. His concentration was disturbed by a meow from the mother

cat in her box of kittens in the corner. Mr. Jake glanced distastefully at the box but said nothing. Leo swallowed drily as the gambler continued to peruse the poster.

"Yes, very nice indeed, Leo," Mr. Jake said at last. "You're coming along quite well as a promoter. Seems like only yesterday you were scratching together four-round club fights. Now—" he waved an all-encompassing hand "—your own gym, your own office, and thirty rounds of boxing at the Stadium. Impressive, Leo. Most impressive."

Leo shrugged modestly. "I've been lucky, Mr. Jake." His expression begged: What do you want?

"No, you've been smart, Leo. You've used your head. It shows. This, for instance." He tapped his glasses case on the poster. "This bum Handley you picked to test young Jackson. I'm sure you gave the matter a lot of thought before selecting him. Am I right?"

"Well, yeah, I guess so—"

"I *know* so, Leo. Because I know you. And I know you would have figured that there's a lot of heavy money behind this Jackson kid. Not just Chicago money, but Detroit money, New York money, Miami money—money from all over. Money that wants to see this boy go all the way up to a title shot within three years. That sort of thing is good for our particular economy; it stimulates people to bet. You understand what I'm saying?"

"You're saying you, uh, don't want him to lose."

"Exactly."

Leo relaxed a little. "Nothing to worry about, Mr. Jake. Handley couldn't whip this kid with a friend. See, Handley's a pushover for a scientific left—"

"Please," Mr. Jake said, raising a hand, "no lectures on the sport. What I want from you is a simple yes or no. The story I hear is that this Handley is training like it was a title go. People who know say they ain't seen nobody train like him since Billy Conn. Now tell me, Leo: is there even an outside chance that this bum can whip Lester Jackson?"

"Absolutely not," Leo said, shaking his head emphatically.

"Guaranteed?"

Leo swallowed drily again. "Guaranteed," he said, forcing the word out.

"Fine, Leo, fine," the dapper gambler said with a smile. "Your word is good enough for me." He rose and came around the desk. The mother

cat jumped out of her box and brushed against his leg. Brutally, Mr. Jake kicked the cat against the wall. It screeched in pain and ran back to its box. "You shouldn't keep cats around, Leo," Mr. Jake lectured. "They get hair all over your clothes."

Leo said nothing. Eddie opened the door for Mr. Jake and followed him out of the office. When they were gone, Leo hurried to the cat and gently examined it. There was nothing broken. He sat down next to the box and took the cat onto his lap. As he petted and comforted it, he glared hatefully at the still-open office door and blinked back tears of frustration at what a man sometimes had to take to get ahead in the world.

Out in the gym, Mr. Jake paused and looked at Dave Handley. The fighter was working the speed bag, his heels rising and falling with the steady, even tempo of his punches. Mr. Jake studied him for a moment, then turned to Eddie. "This bum is the guy you knew from before, right?"

Eddie nodded. "Yes, sir. We grew up in the same neighborhood."

"I think maybe I'll let you have a talk with him."

"Yes, sir. What kind of talk?"

"Friendly. Like a couple of guys who ain't seen each other for a while. I want you to feel him out. See what *he* thinks his chances are. See, Eddie, once a guy gets to *thinking* he can win, then he's got a chance. Know what I'm saying?"

"Yes, sir."

"Maybe I've got nothing to worry about, I don't know. But I just ain't a hundred percent sure of Leo. Anybody that's a sucker for cats might be a sucker for bums like Handley too. So you find out for me, huh, Eddie?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Jake, I will."

Later that day, after he finished training, Handley was walking home to his apartment. He passed the phone booth he had used to call Dora. His pace slowed and he glanced at the booth. Indecision was etched in his face again. He wanted to call her, but he was reluctant to because he was afraid it would be futile. Finally he forced himself away from the temptation of the booth and continued on his way. As he was about to cross the street he heard a voice calling him.

"Hey, Davey! Davey, wait up!"

Turning, he saw Eddie trotting up the sidewalk toward him. He remained on the curb, waiting for him.

"Hey, you old palooka, how you been?" Eddie asked, running up. "I seen you in the gym today. I wanted to say hello but I was with the old man, you know?"

Dave shrugged. "Yeah, sure."

"Hey, come on around the corner to Minocci's—let's split a pizza."

"I better not, Ed. I'm in training."

"Hey, one pizza ain't gonna kill you," Eddie said. He took Dave's arm and pulled him toward the corner. "Come on, we'll get a low-cal pizza, have Minocci leave off some of the sauce—"

Dave thought about the empty apartment waiting for him. He finally allowed himself to be pulled around the corner. Half an hour later, they were facing each other in a booth with a big pizza on a tray between them. Eddie had a pitcher of beer on his side of the table; Dave had water. The two men were reminiscing.

"Hey, you remember back in '59 when we was twelve years old?" Eddie said. "We tried to sneak through the gate at the Stadium to see Sonny Liston box Nino Valdes? We kept waiting and waiting for the gatekeeper to look the other way, and when he finally did and we got inside, the fight was all over. Liston knocked him out in the third."

"Yeah." Handley grinned around a mouthful of pizza. Talking while he chewed, he said. "Remember those three fights Jimmy Bozeman had with Harold Brooke? In the first one he lost a ten-round split decision, in the second one he lost a ten-round *unanimous* decision, and in the third fight he was knocked out in the fifth. Remember that fat guy at ringside that yelled into the ring, 'You better quit fighting this guy, Bozeman! There ain't nothing left but death!' Remember that?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Eddie, trying to keep from choking with laughter. For a few minutes he really enjoyed Handley's company, enjoyed talking over old times, remembering days when life was not nearly so complicated. He sighed wistfully. "Man, there was some fine heavyweights back in those days. Remember Mike DeJohn?"

"Yeah. And Eddie Machen."

"Yeah. And Charley Norkus."

"Good fighters, all of 'em," said Handley.

"Man, they don't make 'em like they used to, huh, Davey?"

"No. Not no more."

Eddie took a swallow of beer and remembered what he was there for. "We sure had some times crashing the gate at the Stadium though. And

now look at us: I get complimentary ringside seats from Mr. Jake and you go in the fighters' door. We still don't pay." He pursed his lips in thought for a moment. "Jeez, who'd ever have thought my old pal Davey woulda turned out to be a fighter."

"Yeah, well, life's funny." A flash of Dora passed through Dave's mind. And sometimes not so funny, he thought.

Eddie's expression turned sly. "So what do you think about this kid Jackson, Dave? You think you can handle him?"

"I'm gonna try."

"Word's around that you're training like it was a title go."

"I'm getting in shape, yeah."

"You really think you can take him?"

Dave leaned forward on his forearms and lowered his voice confidentially. "I think I have a very good chance here, Eddie. Very good. Jackson's gonna use a hit-and-run style against me, see. All's I have to do is cut off the ring on him and get in my licks. I'm looking to go the distance and get the decision."

Eddie nodded thoughtfully. "Well, I'll be there at ringside yelling for you, pal." Eddie smiled as he spoke, but his eyes turned very hard.

When he left Eddie and started home again, Dave passed the same phonebooth for the second time. On impulse, he stopped and called Dora's sister's house.

"Hello, Laverne? Can I please speak with Dorry?"

He waited. After a moment Laverne returned to the line. Dave's expression, as he listened to her words, was one of hurt.

"You mean she won't talk to me at all? Not even to say hello? What? No, I didn't call up to argue. I just wanted to see how she was is all. O.K., so she's just fine. I don't see why she can't tell me herself."

Dave looked down dejectedly as he listened to Laverne's response. He blinked his eyes several times and wiped his nose on the cuff of his jacket sleeve. His face turned sad, helpless.

"O.K.," he said finally, his voice low, almost listless. "O.K., I get the message."

After he hung up he stood there in the booth for a long time.

The next afternoon, when Dave finished his roadwork in the park and jogged up to the gym entrance, a man in a business suit was waiting. "Mr. David Handley?" he asked.

"Yeah, that's me."

The man handed him a summons. "Divorce papers, Mr. Handley. Sorry to have to do this to you so close to the fight. Good luck against Jackson."

"Yeah, thanks." Dave watched him walk away, then stared at the summons he was holding. After a moment he shook his head resignedly and went on into the lobby of the athletic club. At the cigar counter he bought a packaged sandwich, a carton of milk, and two apples, then he went outside and crossed the street into Garfield Park again. He sat on a bench in the warm afternoon sun and began eating.

As he ate, Dave took the divorce summons out of his pocket and tried to read it, but it was too legal, too complex. Finally he shrugged and stuffed it back into his jacket pocket. He finished the sandwich and the milk and as he was stuffing the sandwich paper into the empty carton he glanced up and saw Lester Jackson come into the park, walk to a nearby bench, and sit down, stretching his long legs out in front of him. Knowing that Jackson couldn't help seeing him, Handley took the paper-stuffed carton and lobbed it toward a trash barrel twenty feet away, sinking it, dead-center. Grinning, he looked over at Jackson. The young fighter grinned back and held up two fingers: two points for a basket.

Dave reached into his paper bag and took out the two apples. He looked over at Jackson again. "Want an apple?" he asked.

"Don't mind if I do," said Lester. He came over and sat down on the bench with Handley, who handed him one of the apples. "Couple of times in the gym I was gonna pass the time of day with you," Jackson said, "but my manager said not to."

Dave nodded. "Gotta listen to your manager," he allowed.

"Yeah, he say it ain't good to get friendly with one's opponents."

"He's got a point, I guess," said Dave.

The two men sat looking straight ahead, munching on their apples. There were city sounds around them, but they were in their own little vacuum.

"My manager, he say you been fighting for a while," Jackson commented.

"About fourteen years," said Dave.

Jackson laughed and shook his head. "Man! Fourteen years ago, I wudn't but six years old!"

Dave smiled. "Yeah, Muhammad Ali had just defended the title for the

ninth time when I started fighting. Knocked out Zora Folley in the seventh. Right after that he had all the trouble with the draft and quit fighting. The heavyweight title was wide open. Every young fighter around dreamed of getting a shot at it." Dave grunted softly. "You know, since I've been born there've been eleven heavyweight champions. Some people count up how many Presidents there've been, but me, I count up the heavyweight champions."

"Hey, I know what you mean, man," Jackson said. "The heavyweight title: that's where it's at."

"Yeah. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It's always out there, waiting for somebody to come and take it." He turned and looked steadily at Jackson. "But it ain't easy to get, you know. There's lots of guys like me that a man's gotta get past first. Guys like me, we're called trial horses; we're the backbone of the fight game. We weed out the ones that shouldn't have the title. You know what I mean?"

Jackson nodded slowly. "What you saying is that nobody gets a free ride, right?"

"Right. Not with me, leastways."

"That's the way it ought to be," Jackson declared. "I know I wouldn't want it to be no different. I plan to go all the way to that title, and I want the road to be as tough as it can be. That way, when I do get up there, I'll appreciate what I got."

Dave grinned at him. "You're a pretty smart kid," he said. "Listen, are you in shape for me? Good shape?"

Jackson smiled a lazy smile. "I'm in shape for *anybody*," he said easily.

"Reason I ask is because personally I am *ready*. I mean, man, I'm going in there to fight."

"I'm glad to hear it, man," Jackson replied. "'Cause I want to look *good* for all the peoples gonna be watching me, see? I wouldn't look good if you didn't put up a fight."

"I don't think you get my full meaning," Dave said quietly. "What I'm saying is I think I can win."

Jackson frowned slightly and looked curiously at Handley. "You serious? You think you can beat me?"

"You bet."

"All right!" Jackson said, delighted. He grinned happily. "Hey, you know I was kinda afraid they was gonna give me a bum to begin with—a guy that would make me look good, you know?"

Dave shook his head vigorously. "Not me, kid. I ain't no tanker. Never will be."

"Well, that is *fine*, my friend! You and me, we'll give the turkeys a fight!" Lester held his hand out, palm up, for some skin; instead, Dave shook his hand in the conventional way. Lester beamed. "O.K., tha's cool. You all right, Big Dave." He rose to leave. "Hey, thanks for the apple."

Dave shrugged off the thanks. "See you at the fight, kid."

Across the street in the deserted locker room of the gym, Eddie cornered Pink. "Mr. Jake's got a job for you, pal," the hoodlum said.

"I got a job," Pink replied sullenly.

Eddie's lip curled and he kicked Pink hard in the ankle. Pink groaned and dropped to a bench, clutching his ankle.

"Let's start all over, dummy," Eddie said in a quiet, hard voice. "Mr. Jake's got a job for you."

"O.K., O.K.," Pink groaned. "What is it?"

Eddie sat down beside him. "Mr. Jake and some other gentlemen who are interested in Lester Jackson's future think maybe Big Dave Handley might have trained too hard for this fight. They're worried that he might beat Jackson."

Pink shook his head. "I been watching Jackson train. Dave ain't got a chance."

Eddie put a stiff finger an inch from Pink's nose. "You want to guarantee that with your life?"

Pink shifted his eyes, frightened. "No."

"Then shut up and listen. You know how Dave always likes to suck on a couple of oranges before a fight?"

"Yeah," Pink reluctantly admitted.

"You're the one that's going to bring him the oranges, right?"

Pink didn't answer. Eddie jabbed the stiff forefinger against his chest. "Right?" he insisted.

"Yeah, right," Pink said.

"O.K. On fight night you'll get the oranges from me."

"You might as well pull out your cannon and blow me up right now," Pink said defiantly, "'cause I ain't going to do nothing to hurt Dave!"

"Who's asking you to?" Eddie said innocently. "You think I'd hurt Dave? He's my friend too, you know."

"Then what's this business about the oranges?"

"They'll be doped, but with just enough stuff to slow him down—just enough so's his reflexes won't be as sharp."

"That's wonderful," said Pink. "Then Jackson can rip his head off."

"Jackson's manager will be in on it," Eddie lied. "He'll keep his boy in check. The kid will coast to a nice six-round decision. Everything'll be clean: no knockouts, no blood."

"I don't know," Pink said reluctantly.

"Look," Eddie told him coldly, "I'm not exactly making a request here. What I'm doing is giving you the message from Mr. Jake. If you don't like the deal he'll just have you put in the hospital and we'll find somebody new to work Handley's corner. In the end it still comes out like Mr. Jake wants it."

Pink stared down at the floor, his expression helpless and forlorn. He knew that he was boxed in. What Eddie had just told him was true—there was no way out for him. Shaking his head at the injustice of it, Pink buried his face in his hands. Eddie sneered at the trainer's display of emotion.

"I'll meet you outside Gate Ten a half hour before the fight," he told Pink.

Eddie left the locker room and went down to the lobby. He called Mr. Jake from a phone booth.

"It's all arranged, sir. I'll give him the oranges just before the fight. I laid a line on him about Jackson's manager being in on it, promised that the kid would carry Handley to a six-round decision. Him and Handley are *both* going to be in for a surprise after Handley eats that doped orange. Jackson will rip his head off."

"That's very good, Eddie," said Mr. Jake. "Listen, make sure that orange is doped good. I'm going to lay a bundle out of town that Handley will be stopped in one round."

"No problem, Mr. Jake," Eddie promised.

On the day before the fight, when Dave finished his last workout and walked back to the locker room, all the other fighters in the gym stopped their workouts and followed him. There were about a dozen of them, all sizes, weights, and colors, most of them preliminary fighters like Handley, who made their precarious living in four- and six-rounders. They eased quietly into the locker room and watched as Dave stripped off his sweat-shirt, tossed it on a bench, and opened his locker door. They saw Dave's

mouth drop open; he stared incredulously into the locker. Hanging inside was a new satin robe, red and white, with his name across the back, and a pair of matching satin trunks with his initials on one leg.

"Hey, Pink, where'd this stuff come from?" he asked, turning. Then he saw the other fighters. They smiled in unison and a couple of them raised clenched fists. A tough veteran middleweight named Teddy Falcon stepped forward.

"We all chipped in for it, Davey," he said. "We figure you're one of us, you know. You could have just made a show of fighting this Jackson kid, but you been going at it like there was a title on the line. You're gonna show 'em that you ain't no bum. You're gonna look good in there tomorrow night. And win or lose, when you look good we all look good—'cause you're one of us. The robe and trunks are just our way of saying good luck."

They didn't wait for Dave to thank them. He watched with a dry mouth as they all filed out, leaving him alone. Then he took the robe out and tried it on. It had been a long time since he'd owned a satin robe. Walking over to look at himself in the mirror over the lavatories, his mind went back to the early days when he'd been undefeated, with 12 straight wins, and there had been talk of putting him in against Jerry Quarry or Jimmy Ellis or some other name contender. Then another up-and-coming kid had knocked him out and his stock had dropped drastically. From then on it had been win a few, lose one, win a few, lose one, until now he was 42-and-18, and a six-rounder a few times a year was all he could look forward to. Sighing, looking at himself in the mirror, he wished he had learned a trade of some kind; or at least finished high school. Maybe Dorry was right, he thought, maybe an over-the-hill fighter *was* nothing but a bum.

He shook his head. No, bums don't wear satin. Tomorrow night he'd show the world he was no bum!

He went back to his locker to hang up his new robe so it would look nice for the fight. In case Dorry decided to watch.

On Saturday night before the fight, Eddie stopped in the office of a doctor who owed Mr. Jake several favors. He opened a paper bag and poured half a dozen fresh oranges onto the counter in the doctor's examination room. "Take your pick, Doc," he said.

The doctor squeezed several of the oranges and selected one. Removing

a cloth from a tray, he picked up a hypodermic needle, tested it for flow, and in a quick, deft movement injected the chosen orange with the contents of the vial.

"Don't get it mixed up with the others," he told Eddie.

"Don't worry," Eddie answered. He took a roll of adhesive tape from his pocket, tore off a one-inch strip, and affixed it to the doped orange. "Thanks, Doc," he said.

Outside Gate Ten at the Stadium, Eddie waited with the bag of oranges until a somber-looking Pink shuffled up to him. Eddie handed Pink the bag. "It's the one with the adhesive tape stuck to it."

"You sure it won't hurt him?"

"Not a chance. All it's going to do is slow him down."

Pink sighed quietly and took the bag. He started to walk away.

"Don't forget," Eddie reminded him, "this is for Mr. Jake. If you let him down, he'll be very unhappy. Very."

"Sure, sure," Pink mumbled to himself, going on his way.

"I'll stop by the dressing room later to see if everything is O. K.," Eddie hollered after him.

At seven o'clock, when Handley arrived at his section of the big dressing room, Pink was waiting for him. Handley saw the brown bag on the bench. "Those my oranges?"

"Yeah."

"Peel me one, will you, while I change?"

"Sure." Pink opened the bag. With his back to Handley he removed the orange with the tape on it and studied it for a moment, then he put it back and took out a good orange.

Handley stripped down and strapped on his leather protector, then he slipped into his new trunks and sat down to put on his socks. Pink handed him the peeled sections of orange. Handley tossed one in his mouth, sucked all the juice out of it, and threw the pulp into a trash container.

"Jackson's going to get the surprise of his life, Pink," he said. He tossed another orange section into his mouth.

Pink frowned thoughtfully. "You really think you can take this kid, Dave?" he asked.

"You see how I been training, Pink. I'm *ready*. I can get around his hit-and-run style. I think I'll go the distance with him, and I think I'll get a decision."

"Jeez," Pink said quietly, "wouldn't that be something?"

Dave finished the last of the orange sections. "Let me have another one, Pink."

"Sure." Once again Pink peeled an orange for Handley. After giving him the sections he peeled the doped orange and deliberately began eating it himself.

A few minutes later Eddie came into the dressing room. "Hey, Big Dave, how you feeling?" he said.

"Good, Eddie. I feel good."

"Great. I just dropped in to wish you luck."

"Thanks, Eddie."

As Handley laced up his ring shoes, Eddie looked around. On the end of the bench he saw a small pile of orange peels and in the pile the peel with the adhesive tape on it. He winked at Pink. The trainer nodded.

After Eddie left, Dave bobbed his chin at the door and said, "Eddie's a pretty nice guy, you know?"

"Salt of the earth," Pink replied.

Just then Leo Marvel stuck his head in the door. "O.K., Handley, you're up," he said. "Get in the ring."

Under the bright ring lights the fighters were introduced and called to the center of the ring for their instructions. When that formality was over they returned to their corners and waited for the bell.

Round One.

Dave Handley came out of his corner with everything he had learned in fourteen years of ring warfare—plus the conditioning from the hardest physical training he'd ever done. All of it showed: he was at once at his best against the young Pan Am Games champion.

Lester Jackson was smooth and stylish, with fast hands and fast feet. He moved and stuck and jabbed like a young Ali or a modern-day Ray Robinson. His speed and concentration were flawless. But none of it worked against Handley in that first round.

When Jackson flicked his left jab, it landed not on Handley's face but on his glove. When he threw his overhand right more often than not it missed completely. When he danced around the ring Handley didn't chase him—he stepped to the side and cut off the ring on the younger man. All the while, Lester Jackson was smiling: when his jabs were short, when his hooks missed, when his footwork was neutralized, he smiled. But he was constantly on the defense as Handley, head tucked behind

his cocked right, methodically pressed forward, working him to the body, trying to slow him down. Handley was confident, determined, professional. He moved forward steadily, building up points with a cautious but effective aggressiveness. When the bell sounded, he returned to his corner knowing he had won the first round.

"I can take this kid, Pink!" he said eagerly. "I'm gonna win this fight!"

"Keep working him, Davey," Pink said. His words were slightly slurred. When he leaned over to wipe Handley's face he dropped the sponge.

"What's the matter?" Dave asked. "You sick or something?"

"I'm O.K.," Pink said. He retrieved the sponge, rinsed it in the water bucket, and wiped Handley's face. Then he began to massage the fighter's shoulders.

"He's not as good as I thought he'd be, Pink," Handley said. It was nervous energy talking now, and the words kept coming. "He's not as fast as he looked in training. And his punches ain't sharp, you know? Even when he lands they don't bother me. I'm cutting off the ring on him pretty good, don't you think? I mean, his footwork is O.K. but if I keep cutting the ring in half it won't do him no good—"

The warning buzzer sounded for Round Two. As Pink started to step through the ropes onto the ring apron he slipped and almost fell. Quickly he regained his balance.

"Pink, you sure you're O.K.?" Dave asked, concerned.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," the drugged trainer replied. "Go out and work him this round, Big Dave."

"I'll work him, Pink," Handley said eagerly. "I'll work him for you, pal."

The bell rang. Handley moved out to the center of the ring and resumed his cautious forward attack. But this time Lester Jackson didn't back up. Instead he stood flatfooted and began to tattoo Handley with a series of incredibly fast jabs and hooks. Handley was taken completely by surprise as the blows rained on him with a vengeance. Before he could recover his composure, Jackson finished his flurry and backed off.

Handley went after him. The young black began to move around the ring again—so fast now that Handley was unable to cut him off. As Jackson moved, he flicked out a steady tempo of hard sharp lefts, each of them finding Handley's eye or cheekbone. Dave's head began to snap back with each blow. Trying to regain his earlier momentum, he rushed forward in a sudden attack. Jackson was ready for him. All but one of Dave's

punches missed—and Jackson countered with half a dozen brutal combinations. Dave's knees buckled. He rushed forward again. Jackson drilled him with a solid right. Dave dropped to one knee.

His mouth open, staring incredulously at the crowd, Handley took the mandatory eight-count. As soon as he got back up, Jackson was all over him again. The Lester Jackson of the second round was a far different fighter from the Lester Jackson who had allowed Handley's hopes to soar so high in the first. This Lester Jackson was faster, smoother, harder-hitting, and all business. He went after Handley with grim determination, landing with four or five remarkably accurate punches for every awkward, missing blow Handley attempted. His flashing gloves were like twin pistons: they turned Handley's face beet-red, bloodied his nose, cut his right eyebrow, knocked his mouthpiece out of the ring. Finally, from the sheer volume of blows hitting him, Handley went down again—all the way onto his back this time.

The noise of the crowd resounded in his head as he rolled over and began the long unsteady climb back to his feet. The world around him was a fuzzy, slow-motion place, and from somewhere deep inside an echo chamber he could hear the referee's hollow toll. "Four! Five! Six!"

Just at nine, Handley made it up again. He was a beaten man—it showed in his eyes—but he wasn't frightened, he didn't retreat. He wasn't a tankard, he wasn't a bum. He stood his ground, knowing he had only seconds left.

Jackson's final onslaught came: a series of half a dozen well timed, well placed punches that crashed squarely in Handley's battered face. They took the last ounce of fight out of him and he tumbled to the canvas for the third time.

Dave Handley's agony was over: a technical knockout in the second round.

In the dressing room, Handley was lying on a rubdown table with Leo Marvel looking down at him. A doctor had just finished closing a cut over Handley's eye and sealing it with clips. When the doctor left Leo said, "Can you sit up?"

"Yeah." The word came out slurred. Handley's sinuses were so swollen he had to breathe through his mouth. "Where's Pink?" he asked as Leo helped him raise up and swing his feet over the side.

"I had one of the ushers take him to the gym. He was acting sick," said

he thought he had food poisoning." Leo looked closely at Handley's abused face. "How do you feel?"

"Like I just lost a fight. Leo, that kid is *good*!"

"He's better than good. He'll have the title in three years."

"All that training," Handley said dismally. "And all I was good for was one fast round."

"That's the difference between being twenty and being thirty-four. But you put up a fight, pal. You didn't go in the tank. You didn't look like a bum. Incidentally, are you having trouble with your old lady?"

"Why?"

"Because some shyster divorce lawyer slapped a restraining order on me while you were in the ring. I got to hold up your purse."

Handley stared incredulously at Leo. "I can't believe Dora would do a thing like that."

"Believe it," Leo told him.

From the door someone shouted, "Hey, Leo! They're ready to take pictures of you and Jackson now!"

"O.K.!" Leo yelled back. "I gotta go now," he said to Handley. "Can you get dressed by yourself?"

"Yeah."

Leo started to walk away, then paused and turned back. "What are you gonna do now? Go back to the loading docks?"

Dave shrugged. "I guess. That's about all that's left."

Leo stared at him for a moment, then walked out. Dave slid off the table, steadied himself, and made his way slowly back to a row of shower stalls. He stepped into one of them, still wearing his new trunks, and turned the water on full force. With bowed head, he stood under the rushing water.

Back in the locker room at the gym, Pink was sitting on a bench and Teddy Falcon was helping him drink some steaming coffee.

"You ain't kidding me, man," Falcon said. "You ain't got no food poisoning. You been doped, man. You know that?"

"I—know," Pink said thickly. "They—tried to—dope Dave—but I ate the orange—instead—"

"Who?" Falcon asked. "Who tried to dope him?"

"Mr.—Jake."

From down the row of lockers came another voice. "Did I hear someone mention my name?"

It was Mr. Jake. With Eddie at his side.

"Shove off, Falcon," said Eddie. "And forget what you heard."

Teddy Falcon went out into the gym. There were a dozen other fighters sitting on the bleachers, crowded around a portable black-and-white TV, watching the rest of the Stadium card. "Hey, Teddy, come see this, man," one of them said. "Charley Neal is killing Willie Edwards."

Falcon hurried over to the group.

In the locker room Eddie had dragged Pink off the bench and was holding him up against a locker. He had an open switchblade held dangerously close to one of Pink's albino eyes.

"Do you have any idea how much money you cost me tonight?" Mr. Jake asked him coldly. "I had bets all over the country that Handley wouldn't last one round."

"You shouldn't gamble," Pink said with a silly grin.

Mr. Jake's expression turned livid. "Do it," he told Eddie.

But before Eddie could respond, Teddy Falcon hit him in the back of the head with a water bucket. Eddie dropped like a wet rope.

Falcon and the other fighters crowded around Mr. Jake. "Now wait a minute," Mr. Jake said. "Don't you guys know who I am?"

"You ain't nobody, man," said Falcon. "Not no more."

The dozen fighters engulfed the old gambler, knocking him onto one of the benches, raining practiced blows on every part of his body.

When Leo Marvel arrived back at the gym an hour later Falcon told him what had happened. "We ain't sorry either," he affirmed. "It's tough enough trying to get along in this racket on the straight and narrow without guys like this Mr. Jake trying to make it even harder. It ain't right, Leo. We ain't sorry for what we done, even if we go to jail for it."

"Nobody's going to jail," Leo said quietly. He had two of the fighters get a wet sponge and bring Eddie around.

"Listen to me, punk," he told the hood. "You were Mr. Jake's body-guard and you let him get killed. Your reputation is gonna be zilch around this town when the word gets out. The way I figure it you got maybe eight, ten hours to make tracks. If I was you I'd go somewhere far away, change my name, and get a job pumping gas or something. You know what I'm saying?"

Eddie, staring down at the still form of Mr. Jake, looked sick. He could only nod nervously in reply to Leo's advice.

"O.K., beat it," Leo said. "If you come back around we'll all swear *you* killed Mr. Jake."

After Eddie was gone, Falcon asked about the body. Leo thought about it for a moment, then shrugged and said, "Take it downstairs and drag it down the alley. That's where guys like him belong."

While they were carrying Mr. Jake out, Leo went into his office to see how the kittens were doing.

It was a week after the body had been found that Sergeant Rubino, the Homicide detective, came up to the gym to see Leo.

"Since this guy Jake is known to have had illegal gambling interests," Rubino said, "I thought you might know something about his death."

"Not me," Leo replied. "I'm a sports promoter. I don't have nothing to do with gamblers."

"From the condition of the body," Rubino said, "the coroner figures he was either dragged down the alley by a car or stomped to death by a gorilla. He had bruises all over him."

"Well," Leo speculated, "a guy in his line of work probably had more enemies than friends."

"Yeah." The detective sighed wearily. "It sure would be a lot simpler if I could convince myself it was a car instead of a beating. I could just close it out as another hit and run." Rubino looked across the gym at a figure hanging up speed bags. "Isn't that Dave Handley, the heavy-weight?"

"Ex-heavyweight. He's retired. He works for me now. He's my gym manager."

"Good fighter, Handley. I always liked him. Lost five bucks on him against Jackson." Rubino lighted a cigarette. "I like the fights. Used to go all the time before I had a family. But I can't afford it any more, not on a cop's pay. Well, I won't keep you any longer, Mr. Marvel." He started to leave.

"How do you think this thing about Jake will turn out?" Leo asked, walking with him to the door.

Rubino shrugged. "I'll probably call it a hit and run. Simpler that way."

Leo nodded. "Listen, whenever you want to go to the fights drop in and see me. I'll give you a couple of ringside passes."

"Terrific," Rubino said, smiling. "I got a friend that works for the coroner's office I can take. He's a big fight fan, too. Well, I'd better go. Got to write up that hit-and-run report."

After Rubino left, Leo went into his office and picked up the cat. Cradling her gently in one arm, he walked out to where Handley was working.

"Dave, I'm gonna take Queenie down to the vet to see if she needs vitamins," he said. "You keep an eye on the place while I'm gone."

"Sure, Leo," said Dave. He watched the promoter leave.

"Would you like some coffee, Mr. Louis?" a voice asked.

Dave looked around. It was Ethel, the nervous woman who was Leo's secretary. She was checking the top button of her blouse as she spoke.

"Yeah, I would, thanks," said Dave. He shook his head. He was going to have to tell her his name wasn't Joe Louis.

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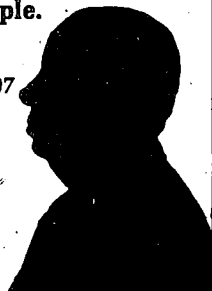
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The only way out for Huey was over Dear Dorie's dead body . . .

DEAR DORIE^{by} JOHN LUTZ



My wife is Dear Dorie. Not to me, but to the millions of readers of her household-hints column that is syndicated to over a hundred major newspapers. You know the sort of column I mean, the one on page six of the Features section that tells you how to resole your own shoes or convert a common bathroom plunger into an attractive plant stand, or maybe tells you a hundred and one uses for eggshells. Dorie, at age thirty-five, writes the most popular of all these columns, and is herself a devotee of the

economical clever shortcut or fresh approach. The trouble is that most of her household hints are more clever than they are practical, which is why Dorie is no longer dear to me.

A classic metamorphosis of love to hate, you might say. Within a year after our marriage I came to loathe eating sandwiches on day-old bargain bread, sleeping beneath a quilt one square of which I recognized as a pocket of my favorite old sportcoat, walking across a living room carpeted wall-to-wall with free sample squares of the discontinued products of various looms, watching snowbound television received through copper plumbing that had been utilized as a giant TV antenna. Her many fans would be pleased to know that Dorie lives what she writes. As for me, I long for the company of a free-spending real blonde who doesn't bleach her hair with lemon juice rather than the expensive brand-name stuff.

On the other hand, Dorie has made a pile of money. Myself, I'm too practical to settle for a divorce and half our assets. Dorie would understand that. So there seems to be no way out of this torturous yet profitable marriage other than over Dorie's dead body. Maybe she knows a way to make some tool or kitchen utensil into a gun.

But I know better than to resort to that. No gun, knife, blunt instrument, or radio in the bathtub will work here. I'm going to have to come up with something that looks like an accident and can't be proved otherwise if the police suspect. They do always suspect the husband, so I'm compelled to devise something clever. And soon. Because Dorie is driving me whacko.

"Look, Huey," she says, spinning her dumpy frame like a model demonstrating the lines of a new dress. "My latest. Isn't it the perfect solution for all those runny noses and household spills?" What she's demonstrating is a roll of toilet paper strung from her belt on a length of yarn. "If you slosh milk over a glass rim or your kid's nose is dripping," she proclaims, "all you have to do is pull and tear and you have a towel at your disposal anyplace, any time!"

Great, if you don't mind walking around all day with a roll of toilet paper perched on your hip.

"Clever," I say, going back to the magazine I'm reading. I'm not fool enough to get on the bad side of Dorie. She can be vengeful and devious. Like the time we had an argument and she stuck the label from my roll-on deodorant onto a similar bottle of some kind of super household glue—the brand they show on television supporting the weight of an

automobile. I spent five uncomfortable hours and uttered a dozen unreasonable promises before she told me the simple kitchen-ingredient formula that would dissolve the glue. I don't want to endure anything like that ever again.

"I'll think of something," I mutter, absently scratching beneath my left arm.

"What was that, Huey?" Dorie asks.

"Only talking to myself, dear," I tell her, turning another page of the gourmet magazine over which I'm salivating.

"You can break that habit by carrying a recorder, then playing it back at the end of each day to hear how ridiculous you sound," she assures me.

That afternoon, as we eat our lunch of leftovers combined to make tasteless and nourishing dishes, I wonder as I have many times why we must exist like underpaid scroungers. We have plenty of money. And we lease a convenient tenth-floor apartment in one of the safest areas of town. But everything inside that apartment is handmade, makeshift, second-hand, or bargain basement.

Lunch is over. I start to clear the plastic-coated washable paper plates while Dorie yanks a few squares of paper from the roll at her waist and wipes off the table. As I place the dishes in the sink, I snag my thumbnail on one of the plates and curse. There is a nasty tear in the nail.

"Tsk, ts," Dorie says, examining the nail. "But no problem."

Before I know it, she's placed a glob of her diabolically quick-drying plastic cement on the thumbnail. "That should hold until the nail grows out far enough to trim," she says cheerily.

True, but a glance at my hand gives the impression I'm Dr. Jekyll in the process of becoming Mr. Hyde.

Time to go shopping. I accompany Dorie to a local used-clothing store, where she spends four dollars on a Women's Marine Corps skirt for her and a threadbare oversized suit for me. She has a way to make the suit look like new, she says, altered to my size with nothing but cleverly concealed safety pins.

After a stop at a nearby bakery for half-price stale glazed doughnuts, we head for home. We are walking, naturally—a raincoated woman with what appears to be a malformed hip and a nervous-looking man with an

ugly right thumb. Maybe I'm imagining the stares of passersby. I'm imagining a lot of things lately. Such as what it must be like to live alone.

"Simplicity," Dwayne, my venerable bartender, tells me that evening, "breeds success." I go regularly to Dwayne's Dungeon to escape Dorie. At Dwayne's the drinks are grossly overpriced. I like that.

"You mean," Lacey, the glamorous platinum blonde, asks from a barstool near mine, "like it's easy to fix a model-A Ford with a pliers and screwdriver; but these fancy new models you gotta take to a dealer when something goes wrong?"

"Like that," Dwayne confirms.

Lacey nods sagely and sips her beer. Herself undeniably simple, she is another feature of Dwayne's Dungeon that appeals to me. I suspect she is really a plain brunette who spends a fortune each week at the beauty parlor.

"So the car manufacturers lose business to the simpler, smaller foreign models," Dwayne says. "They get too clever and outsmart themselves is what happens. People do that all the time. Am I right?"

"Righter than you know," I tell him, wondering what it would be like to spend more time with Lacey. She truly is a beautiful girl—or manages to look like one. Dorie, under the best of circumstances, is not actually pretty. Pretty isn't economical or ingenious.

"What's that?" Lacey asks. I realize she is talking to me.

I'm sitting with my legs crossed and my pants legs have worked up my calves. Lacey is pointing to the button sewn near the top of my left sock. "My wife sews buttons on all my black socks," I explain. "That way I don't confuse them with brown socks in the dark."

Lacey and Dwayne stare at me.

"That," Lacey says, "is stupid."

I feel myself flush. "Oh? How would you solve the problem?"

"If you were my husband, Huey, sometimes you'd wear one brown sock and one black sock."

I laugh so hard I spill some of my drink. Dwayne wipes the puddle from the bar with a real towel, grinning wonderingly at my outburst of mirth. Lacey is laughing along with me. She'll laugh at anything.

"What's funny?" Dwayne asks.

"I would love to wear one brown sock and one black sock," I tell him. "It's a nice, simple approach to the problem."

"Simplicity is the key to life," Dwayne reminds me.

And maybe to death, I tell myself. Living with Dorie has indeed affected my mind. I've been making complicated what really is a relatively simple problem to solve, the problem being Dorie's continued existence on planet earth. Dwayne has spoken wisely and provided me with heightened determination.

The next morning, I carry a yardstick to the window and look down at Second Avenue ten stories below. Then I open the window a crack, insert the yardstick so it protrudes outside a few feet beyond the sill, then close the window on it.

After making sure no one is in the hall, I climb the stairs two flights to the roof service-exit. I cross the graveled roof to the building's Second Avenue side.

I've always been afraid of heights, but I force myself to look down over the tiled edge of the roof until I can see the yardstick two stories below, then I move with careful sideways steps until I'm directly above the yardstick and with a key I make a tiny scratch on the tile. With a last shuddering glance down at the sidewalk, I hurry back to the apartment.

No one's seen me, I'm sure. I remove the yardstick and replace it in its holder fashioned from a cardboard tube that once held wrapping paper. I've solved the problem of Dorie's physical strength and ferocity. It might be impossible for me to force her out a window. Certainly there would be at least some subtle sign of struggle or wrongdoing. Unless that emancipating action occurred elsewhere.

When Dorie returns from her morning meeting with an editor I treat her with my normal subservient amiability. While listening to her typewriter clattering in an adjoining room I sit blankly before a flickering TV soap opera, staring inward at my own private drama, summoning courage.

The mad typing stops. Dorie is revising what she's written. I inanely find myself wondering if ordinary toothpaste will remove blood. Was that in one of her columns? It doesn't matter, I tell myself, and I call, "Dorie!"

She enters the living room with a quizzical annoyed expression on her shinily scrubbed face. Dorie hates to be disturbed while at work.

"I've made reservations for us for an hour from now at Rinaldi's," I tell her. Rinaldi's is the most expensive restaurant in the city, specializing in lobster, which Dorie despises.

Her lemon-lightened eyebrows meet above the bridge of her nose in an ominous scowl. "You *what*?" I reach down and activate the concealed

tape recorder by my chair as Dorie begins to rant. It goes very well. I'm able to goad her into screaming at me for the next five minutes.

Supper that night consists of rice, lettuce salad, and an unusual dish incorporating beef cubes and Jello. I am chastised. Dorie and I have reached a truce. She informs me over her cup of generic coffee that she forgives me for my aberrant behavior. I do the dishes.

Two days later, as we're seated in the living room sharing the morning newspaper, I swallow hard and mention that I recently noticed something that might interest her professionally. "And what's that?" she asks dubiously, having never received an idea from me that she's used in her column.

"I was up on the roof yesterday," I begin.

"Doing what, for heaven's sake?"

My mind races, gears slipping cogs. "I'd never been up there before—never really examined it."

Dorie flashes me an astounded look.

"What I saw," I continue, "was a weather vane on the next roof. It seems to be homemade, mostly out of cleverly snipped and painted beer cans."

Dorie drops her section of newspaper and leans forward intently. "Beer cans?" No doubt she's thinking of the hundreds of uses she has found for drained beer cans—vases, pencil holders, gift containers, wind chimes—but so far no weather vanes.

I grin and put down my paper as if infected by her curiosity and enthusiasm. "Come on," I say. "I'll show you."

She stands immediately, thinking of nothing but a new column idea. As I get out of my chair to accompany her to the roof, I punch the play button of the concealed recorder, which is turned to top volume.

By the time we reach the roof the silent first two minutes of tape have run and the recording of our most recent argument is blasting through our apartment. At least one of the neighbors will hear us shouting.

I lead Dorie to the mark on the tile at the roof's edge directly above our apartment window.

"There," I say, pointing toward the jumble of ductwork and air-conditioning equipment on the roof across the street.

Dorie's eyes narrow as she strains to locate the weather vane. "I don't see anything, Huey."

"You have to move over here," I tell her, positioning her precisely before the mark on the tile. "You have to look between those two chimneys."

"I still don't—"

She never finishes what she's about to say. I've planted the palm of my right hand firmly against the small of her back and pushed her out into space twelve stories above the sidewalk. Even as I shove, I turn away, afraid of being made dizzy by the sight of her plummeting body.

I hurry back downstairs to the apartment, unseen, and let myself in. I've already opened the window over where Dorie's broken body now lies. The recording of our argument has run down and is silent. I bend and scoop up the recorder, and even as I phone the police with my tragic story the tape is being erased.

Within a few minutes the police are knocking on my door. I repeat my story to two uniformed officers, turning in what I consider to be a very believable performance. I'm definitely going to relish the role of grieving widower.

A lanky redheaded man who introduces himself as Lieutenant Gaston sits across from me in the living room and listens to my story. He has questions.

"So you had an argument," he says, "and you told your wife you wanted a divorce?"

"Correct, Lieutenant," I admit shakily. "No doubt some of the neighbors heard us shouting."

The lieutenant consults his notes. "She objected to a divorce, became distraught, told you she was going to commit suicide rather than lose you, then jumped out the window."

"Exactly," I tell him. "Of course, I didn't dream she was serious—" I manage a mournful snuffle "—until it was too late."

"That window?" Lieutenant Gaston asks, pointing.

I nod. The window is still open, the curtains hanging limp in the motionless summer air.

Gaston sighs and stands. "Would you accompany me downstairs, sir?"

I feel suddenly ill. My throat is dry. "To identify the—?"

"Not exactly," Lieutenant Gaston says. He holds the door to the hall open for me.

Neither of us speaks as the elevator descends, or as we walk through

the lobby to the Second Avenue exit. The crowd that has gathered gapes at me. As we step from the air-conditioned lobby, my knees abruptly feel weak. Dorie's body is behind a roped-off area guarded by policemen. The rope is lifted and Lieutenant Gaston holds my elbow as we duck underneath. I cannot bring myself to look at Dorie.

"If your wife jumped from the tenth-floor window of your apartment," Lieutenant Gaston asks, "how do you explain that?"

Now I do look.

Dorie isn't as horrible a sight as I'd imagined. Strangely, there is very little blood, only an odd contortion to her broken limbs. The really horrible sight is the long white ribbon of toilet paper, gracefully extending from the now thin roll on her hip up, up, up, to where the other end of the paper is snagged on one of the roof tiles.

The paper is the barely perforated kind that's as difficult to tear as old rags. It must have caught on the roof as I pushed Dorie, then unfurled from the roll on her waist as she fell.

"I'm waiting for an explanation," Lieutenant Gaston says. His grip on my elbow tightens, constricting along with my throat.

I struggle to speak, to protest my innocence. But not very convincingly, I'm afraid. The croak that escapes my lips seems to be the voice of a stranger. "I don't understand—"

Lieutenant Gaston is speaking to me in a policeman's dreary monotone, reading my rights from a tiny card he's holding in his free hand. He informs me that, among other limited options, I have the right to remain silent.

I wish Dorie were alive to think of something clever I can do to pass the time in prison.

**The October 14 Issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's*
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Wilbert eyed his brother with cop curiosity . . .

BROTHER CAN YOU SQUARE A CRIME?

by
**WILLIAM
BANKIER**



It was a perfectly understandable mistake. Everybody knows that both sides of a divided highway look the same unless there are cars driving along them to show which way is which. Especially late at night.

Darcy Clemens was bombing along in the direction of Baytown when he saw a car on the other side of the grassy divider traveling in the same direction. He would have considered the other driver guilty of drunken

irresponsibility except for two reasons. It was a police cruiser. And he, Darcy Clemens, was well and truly bagged.

Clemens took the only possible action in the circumstances—he drove onto the dividing island and switched off. The police officer who came to interview him was Jack Pope. Just my luck, Clemens thought. For one pathetic moment he had hoped his brother Wilbert might be on duty. Not that puritanical, pig-headed Wilbert would have let him off easily. In one of his moods, Wilbert might have forced him out of the car and shot him while trying to escape.

As it was, Jack Pope took a dim view of the situation. Pope believed people shouldn't go racing about in cars while under the influence of inkahol, as the witty burghers of Baytown liked to put it.

"Oh, it's you, Doctor Clemens." Pope waved his flashlight around the car's interior, establishing that there was no passenger. The light returned to the fleshy, perspiring face behind the wheel. "You shouldn't be driving in this condition, sir."

"What condition?" Clemens was so drunk he didn't know his windshield wipers from his dipstick. "Happened to miss the entrance to the town-bound lane, that's all."

"That's how head-on collisions occur." Pope was writing in his notebook.

"Can't we let it go this time? It won't happen again."

"Sorry, sir." Pope slid behind the wheel and drove the doctor's car off the road, parking it near a billboard. "You'll remember where it is, sir?" Then he walked his man to the cruiser and delivered him home to the massive stone house on Bridge Street. The place was lit up like an ocean liner although Clemens knew Janice was the only person there. His wife couldn't walk into a room without turning on four lamps. It was one of her phobias—rooms without light.

The officer bade the doctor a courteous goodnight and drove away in the direction of the Metralia highway. Clemens went inside and found Janice in the bedroom doing an inventory of her price tags. She had cupboards full of expensive sweaters and blouses. The bedside drawer was reserved for the price tags that had come attached to these garments.

Clemens watched her from the doorway as she sorted through the string-tags, smiling at the memory of purchases lost in the mists of time. He imagined a squirrel must derive similar satisfaction from sitting on a pile of hickory nuts.

"You think *you've* got troubles," he said at last. There was no evidence that his wife had trouble or thought she had.

"Joe E. Lewis," she said without turning to look at him. "You're doing Joe E. Lewis in one of his drunk routines."

He came into the room, skating past the edge of the bed, and described what had happened. "A silly little mistake," he said, "and now I'm going to have to show up in court."

"So, a fine. If you need money I can let you have some." Janice Latchworth Clemens, daughter of one of the richest families in Baytown, and Darcy Clemens, senior psychiatrist at Floral County Hospital, were always throwing money at each other the way fighters throw kisses from the ring.

"It isn't the money," Darcy said. "You know what my political enemies will make of this. I've been an alderman for three years. I'm all set to run for Mayor in the autumn. But when they get hold of a drunken driving charge, they'll murder me."

Janice closed the drawer and stood up. She was a tall woman, slim as a rake, with blonde hair swept up like a wave breaking against the rock of her determined face. She towered over her husband, who was bullet-headed and barrel-chested and stood with feet apart and fists clenched like a man imitating a bulldog. The impression was that she was about to slip the leash and let him go for a run.

But Janice was thinking of something else. "Wilbert," she said.

"Yes, I thought of him too. Do you think he'll listen to reason?"

"Why not? He's your brother."

Clemens would have been more inclined to agree with her had she said "He's a Martian." Brothers? One of them must have been left in a basket on the doorstep. Thinking of his mother, Leonora, Darcy Clemens rather hoped, if that was the case, the foundling was himself.

A cigarette hanging from her lip, Leonora Clemens was standing over a sizzling frying pan, shifting with a fork from time to time half a dozen charred sausages. Her belief was that pork contains live beasts that have to be tortured and killed by prolonged exposure to fire before the meat is fit to be eaten. Half an inch of ash dropped from her cigarette into the pan. Dreamily, she stirred it into the fat.

Wilbert Clemens sat at the kitchen table facing the cat, a grey tabby posing like a loaf of bread on the chair beside him. By pulling faces at it,

he was trying to make the cat laugh. It watched his contortions with glass eyes.

"We're out of beer," Leonora said. Mrs. Clemens hadn't been out of the house in several years. She wore the same patterned housedress week in and week out, washing it before bedtime and letting it dry overnight. She owned other dresses but she liked this one.

"I'll get some after supper," Wilbert said.

"How much are you betting on the ball game?" She was cutting bread now, holding the loaf against her chest and sawing the knife toward herself. She had buttered the end of the loaf.

"I'll put fifty dollars on Pittsburgh."

"That leaves me the Expos—you should give me odds."

"Two to one." The bet went on accumulating throughout the baseball season and was imaginary. No money ever changed hands.

The screen door slammed at the front of the house.

"Anybody home?" Darcy came through sluggishly from the dining room, his shoes scuffing on the broken linoleum. "Hi. Sorry to catch you when you're going to eat."

"There isn't enough," his mother said. "Go and read a book till we're finished."

"It's Wilbert I want to talk to. You get things organized, Leonora. I can't stay anyway. Come on, Wilbert."

Wilbert followed Darcy into the living room and sprawled on the settee. Darcy spread a newspaper on a chair to protect his trousers from the cat hairs that covered everything. He sat on the crackling surface and surveyed his surroundings with distaste—the faded wallpaper, the drab chintz curtains, the sloping floor, the upholstery sprouting styrofoam patches.

"Why do you go on living here?" he demanded. "You make good money. I could let you have more if you need it."

"It's humble but it's home," Wilbert said.

"It's a septic tank—it should be condemned. I'd send in a health inspector only I'm afraid he might die."

Wilbert eyed his brother with cop curiosity. "You didn't come here to make me and Mum feel better," he said. "By the way, why do you call her Leonora? She isn't your secretary."

"I'm in trouble, Will. I need your help."

Darcy went on to explain the encounter on the highway the night

before. "If I come to court," he concluded, "my political opponents will hear about it and I can kiss my mayoralty bid goodbye."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Speak to Jack Pope. Put in a word for me. You're his colleague—surely you guys do each other little favors."

"But you broke the law. Jack apprehended you and he's already put the wheels in motion. Nobody can do anything."

"What wheels? He wrote my name in a notebook. Notebooks can be lost or put away in a drawer and who's to know?"

"It wouldn't be right."

"All I did was drive down the wrong lane. Nothing happened."

"You were drunk. You could have run into another car and killed somebody."

"So you aren't on my side. You're defending a moral concept and your own brother can go to hell."

"Come and get it!" Leonora Clemens yelled from the kitchen. "Not you, Darcy."

"Keep talking, I can hear you," Janice Clemens said. She was sitting at her vanity table with the telephone beside her, dialing the long-distance operator.

Darcy Clemens was stretched out on the bed with a glass of whisky balanced on his chest, the bottle on the carpet beside his dangling hand. Being thwarted was taking away his joy of drinking. Thwarting was something he couldn't tolerate. As a boy he used to seize Wilbert's wrist in his hands and twist the skin both ways at once in a Chinese Burn in order to make his brother scream. But Wilbert refused to scream, thwarting him deliberately.

"There must be a way for me to coerce that stubborn baby brother of mine," Darcy said. "Leverage, I need leverage."

"Hello, Operator? I'd like to place a collect call to Montreal." Janice gave the number. "Person to person, to speak to Raphael Stone." She waited. "He isn't there? Never mind, cancel the call."

"Who's Raphael Stone?"

"Nobody. It's a code, my sister understands. Raphael Stone means all is well and I'm coming down on Labor Day weekend." Thus did two of the wealthiest women in Canada cheat the telephone company out of a couple of dollars in long-distance charges.

"I wish you'd pay attention to me for a minute."

"I am. I solved your problem long ago." Janice was dialing again. "Hello, Operator? I'd like to place a collect call to Vancouver." She gave the number. "Person to person, to speak to Mr. Valentine Hope."

"All right, clever lady. What should I do to make Wilbert cooperate?"

"That's easy. He loves that creepy life style of his, holed up with your mother. Well, threaten it."

"How?"

"Darcy, you're the psychiatrist, aren't you? Anybody can see that old lady should be institutionalized. And as the head of an institution, not to mention being the lady's older son, you have the power to sign the papers."

Clemens sat bolt upright and tossed back his drink. He could taste the whisky again. "You're a genius, Janice. A freak by any standards, but a brainy one."

"Not there? Thank you, Operator, no—cancel the call, please."

Her husband was up, scuffling into his shoes as he began to knot his tie. "There's no time to waste. I'm going over to see Wilbert right now." At the door he said, "By the way, what does Valentine Hope mean?"

Janice was dialing again. "It means I'll be in Montreal with my sister over Labor Day and we'd love to have our girl friend from Vancouver fly down and join us. Hello, Operator—?"

The living room in the old house was dark except for the green glow of the transistor radio. Clemens crept in, stepping on the cat, which went off like the siren on Jack Pope's police cruiser. The gossip voices of the baseball commentary team were nattering on about a recent fishing trip, interjecting an occasional reference to a ball or a strike. The place smelled like the Coronet Hotel beer parlor.

"Where is everybody?"

"Sit on the hassock," Wilbert said. "I'm lying on the settee."

"I liked it better when you were a stranger," Mrs. Clemens said.

"Come into the kitchen, Will. I have to talk to you, it's important."

"You're sure calling me Will a lot lately." The old settee sighed with relief as Wilbert got off it. "I hate to see you in such bad trouble."

The brothers filed through the darkened house to the kitchen like miners escaping a pit collapse. "Don't put on the light," Wilbert advised. "It only gets the roaches in a turmoil."

"Are you going to change your mind and intercede on my behalf with Jack Pope?"

"I don't think so. Anyway, I'm on my three-day leave."

"You'd better go in and talk to him tomorrow."

"I can't."

"Because here's what I'll do if you don't. I shall conduct an interview with that cuckoo clock in there who says she's my mother and who certainly could be yours."

"She won't help you."

"Listen. My talk with her will be professional. I will assess her eligibility for existence in the outside world. I will find her unqualified. In short, I will fill out the papers, I will sign the papers, and Leonora Clemens will be committed to Floral County Hospital. For her own good."

The pause was long enough that Wilbert might have been listening to the baseball broadcast filtering in from the far room. At last he said, "Aw, come on, Darcy—"

"Aw, come on, *Wilbert!* I intend to run for Mayor, brother of mine! This driving offense would kill my chances! I want it quashed!"

"But you broke the law."

"Then tomorrow I'm going to see about putting away that silver-haired drinking buddy of yours in a place where all they worry about is whose teeth they get back in the morning."

"Let me think about it." Wilbert saw his brother out. He was stalling, which wasn't his style but he didn't know what else to do.

In the morning Wilbert Clemens awoke with the awareness of a presence in the bedroom doorway. He reared up on one elbow and tried to focus on his mother, who was leaning on the frame watching him. "Potatoes and bread and eggs," she said.

"Mmmmm?" He saw the lighted cigarette in one hand, the sheaf of cigarettes in the other. She didn't like to break the chain.

"When you go to the market. Potatoes and bread and eggs."

He walked downtown after ten o'clock carrying the grocery order in his head and his mother's library books under one arm. He walked across the high school campus, noticing how grass managed to sprout in patches on the dusty playing field in the few weeks of summer vacation. Even during school days, Darcy had been the achiever, Wilbert the watcher. He remembered a rugby game in which Darcy played halfback and Wil-

bert led the cheers from the sidelines. He could see a big tackle from the visiting team picking up his brother and slamming him down on his back, Darcy lying still, the medic running onto the field with his black bag. He had wanted to kill that tackle who looked so smugly pleased with what he had done.

On another occasion the gymnasium had been festooned with crepe, the floor sprinkled with powdered wax, and the juke box putting out the siren sound of Harry James playing "Sweet and Lovely." He'd found the courage to ask Janice Latchworth for a dance and she'd said yes, looking amused. Halfway through the dance, Darcy had cut in and that was the end of that. Or the beginning.

Wilbert went to the library first, turned in his mother's books, and selected a couple of the thrillers he knew she liked. The choice was open—she could read any book any number of times. Next he went to the supermarket and carried a basket around, selecting only what he'd been asked to get.

What would he do if Darcy had Mother committed? She'd hate living in an institution. She probably wouldn't last long there. And he'd be alone at home. The old place—he loved it—hardly made sense even for the two of them. With Mum gone he'd probably have to move into some sterile apartment. Surely Darcy wouldn't carry out such a cruel threat. There had to be some way of dissuading him.

The market was connected to a department store. It was Wilbert's habit whenever he was shopping to go into the store and enjoy a leisurely round trip on the escalators. He did so now, bathing in the air-conditioning and the sound of recorded music, looking at the merchandise but mostly at the people.

He saw Janice! She was on the second floor, drifting aimlessly, it seemed, between the counters. This had to be fate. He was meant to talk to Janice, to persuade her to have a word with Darcy, using her influence to prevent him from making this terrible mistake.

Wilbert crossed over to the down escalator, keeping his eyes open for a sighting of Janice. She wasn't far away, facing a counter on which was displayed a range of good-quality felt pens mounted on bubble-pack cards. They were worth about four dollars each. As Wilbert watched, Janice took a couple of the pens and stuffed them into her shoulder bag. Then she zipped it up and moved away.

Wilbert couldn't believe his eyes. He couldn't believe his luck. He

followed his sister-in-law at a distance until she left the store. Then he overtook her on the pavement.

"You're under arrest," he said.

She jumped, then saw who it was and laughed. "You scared me, Wilbert."

"I hope so. I saw you ripping off those pens. You really are under arrest."

"You're joking." Her aristocratic face went pale under the peach makeup. "Think of Darcy."

"That's what I'm doing. Come with me." He led her into a coffee shop where there was a pay phone. He dialed the number of the hospital and was put through to his brother. "It's me."

"I hope you've made the right decision," Darcy said.

"I have. Your wife is in my custody right now. I've arrested her for shoplifting." He went on to describe the event. "For all I know there are other items in that bag besides the pens." He knew he was right by the way Janice turned to stare out the window.

"You can't do this, Willie. It would ruin me."

"Willie? I've really got to you, haven't I? Yes, it would fix you in politics. Baytown might forgive drunken driving—they all drive and they're all drunk part of the time—but a wealthy lady taking little items without paying for them, that's like fishing with a machine gun."

"Wilbert, don't do this."

"I won't. But only if you do something for me. Can you guess?"

"Drop the thing about committing Leonora."

"That's right. Only I don't trust you. If I were to let Janice out of my sight I could never prove shoplifting. So here's what we do. Your wife and I wait here at Lomax's Coffee Shop. You type out a letter now addressed to me saying Mrs. Leonora Clemens is sound of mind and needs no special care or treatment. Sign it and bring it to me here. I'll give you forty-five minutes before I take Janice back to see the store manager."

Three days later, back on duty, Wilbert Clemens managed to run into Jack Pope having coffee at a roadside stand. "How goes it, Jack?"

"Dirty and dismal."

"Jack, I understand you picked up my brother the other night. When does the case come to court?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Sure."

"It doesn't come to court." Pope lowered his chin and his voice. "After I delivered Darcy home, I drove in on to Metralia. They've got a huge red-light district there, did you know that? Girls of all nations."

"But you have no authority to make arrests in Metralia."

"I don't go there to make arrests. I go to change my luck." Pope shook his head. "I sure changed it that night. From bad to none at all."

"What happened?"

The embarrassed police officer explained how he picked up the prettiest Eurasian girl he'd ever seen. They went to a five-dollar room. They drank. There must have been something in the booze. When Pope woke up, he was naked in bed. The girl was gone and, to lessen the possibility of pursuit or of legal action, his clothes and money were gone too. "They even took my notebook with all my activities in it, including your brother's arrest. I figure she kept the money and put everything else in an incinerator somewhere."

"How did you get home?"

"Wrapped in a dusty window curtain. Try that sometime when you're driving a police car. It does wonders for your humility."

A week later Wilbert's telephone rang and it was Darcy. "I haven't received a summons," he said. "I was wondering what's happened."

"You aren't going to receive one."

Darcy cackled down the phone. "You sweetheart. You did it after all, you got Jack Pope to bury the charge."

"In future, when you drink, don't drive," Wilbert said noncommittally.

"First you let that crazy wife of mine off a shoplifting offense, then you connive with a fellow officer to subvert the course of justice. I declare, little brother, you're catching up to me in wickedness. I may end up getting you into politics."

That was a funny idea. Wilbert Clemens went back on duty, a quiet Wednesday afternoon directing traffic at the four corners. It left him time to consider the possibility of two brothers running against each other for Mayor. Even Baytown had never seen a race like that.

To be sure, he was an amateur and a rank outsider at the game. But he had a couple of things he could use, if necessary, against his chief opponent. Hmmmmmm.

The relic of a jail hadn't been used since 1930 . . .

THE BLACK GOLD JAIL

by
**GARY
ALEXANDER**



I was driving home from our weekly Black Gold Preservation Society meeting, dog-tired and a little hot under the collar too. Before the meeting, I'd put in one helluva day on our latest restoration project, the old two-cell wooden jail, working my hands raw on the rotted timbers and making damn little headway.

My dander was up. About the only help I was getting was the moral-support variety, which is pretty worthless. There was a nice turnout at

the meeting though, including a few more recruits. The trouble was that everyone volunteered for chores like spiffing up the railroad depot, which is going to become a museum, or working on our quarterly newsletter. It seems that everyone in this day and age thinks a little manual labor'll make them break out in hives or something. Four or five of us boys have been carrying the load. I got it off my chest at the meeting, making it as clear as I could that they'd better start pitching in or they could find themselves another coolie.

Just before the turnoff to my cabin, where there's a break in the brush, I thought I saw a flash of light and pulled onto the shoulder, unsnapped my Winchester 94 from the rack behind my seat, and headed up my driveway on foot. Actually it's a lot longer than a driveway and it rides like a fishing road reject—I cleared it myself before I built the cabin back in 1921.

Halfway up was an old clunker, my TV set and Victrola in the back seat. I took it slow and easy from there on up; didn't make a sound. After sixty years you get to know your land.

I reached the cabin just as the burglar was coming out a window feet first.

The last time I used my rifle in anger was when I shot the right rear tire out of a truck full of scabs the company had brought in during the strike of 1926. I didn't want any trouble with this bird, so I figured I'd bluff him into behaving. "Hold it!" I yelled. "You're under arrest."

His head was still inside and I saw him look around. "You the law, Pop?"

"Far as you're concerned."

"Not good enough for me, Pop. Gimme some space if you got any sense left."

It was dark now, so I guess he could just see me, not my gun. I'm eighty-two years old and not what you'd call intimidating, although I can remember when I used to be five-foot-six. I nudged him with the barrel of my 94 in the area of his trousers a J. C. Penney clerk might call the inseam and told him to come on out.

He got the message, sliding out nice and gentle as if he was greased. He put his hands on top of his head like he'd had practice at it.

"Maybe you got something on me, maybe you don't," he said. "Go ahead and Mirandize me, Pop, and take me in. I'm not saying no more till I see my lawyer."

He was just a kid, but a tall one. He had a beard and a head of hair like a briar patch and the kind of mean face that made me think the doctor had slapped him on the wrong end when he was born.

"You the law here, Pop? You'd better read me my rights before you nod off." He took a step closer, grinning. "Or maybe you're just a hermit who lives here. I'll just take your piece and go about my business."

I chambered a round in my 94, which I hadn't done before because of the noise it'd make. He froze.

"You got the right to remain silent," I told him.

He took me up on it.

I don't have a phone, so we went into Black Gold to call the sheriff, him driving my pickup, me riding with my 94 in his ribs.

Besides being chief flunky on the restoration projects I was Black Gold's unofficial historian on account of my seniority. I lived here when Black Gold had a thousand residents instead of the two hundred fifty or so now. I worked the coal mines when we took out the best low-sulphur bituminous in the Pacific Northwest. At the time we had the deepest slope mine in the world—Number Eleven, if I recall—going down almost a mile. You want to get heat stroke in January, you ought to work the thirteenth level, packing timbers.

The mines didn't shut down because the veins petered out. Cheap oil and gas came along and that was all she wrote. There's been scuttlebutt lately about the mines reopening, but I haven't seen any engineers and executive types prowling around, so I'm not holding my breath.

I directed my prisoner to the Black Gold Tavern, where we have our meetings. It was about nine o'clock and nothing else was open.

When I marched him in, Frank Henna, the owner, was behind the bar. Jack Lyon and Charlie Blasingame were chalking up for a game of eight-ball. They definitely weren't hanging around to reread the minutes of the meeting. Jack and Charlie had done the train depot damn near singlehanded.

Jack's mouth dropped open so far I thought his lower jaw was going to bang against a side pocket.

"What the hell you got here, Ned?"

I told my story and asked Frank to get on the horn.

"We've got a problem," Frank said. "I got it from Deputy Hastings, who covers Black Gold. There's a drag race on tonight in town, and a

rock concert too. Plus the Secretary of Something-or-Other is in from D.C. to give a speech. They've got every officer on the force on duty tonight—even jerked some guys off vacation. Hastings says that if we have trouble, unless it's a biggie like mass murder, we might have to wait until morning to get a car up here."

"We're taxpayers too," Charlie grumbled.

"We're also forty minutes from town," Frank reminded him.

"I see their point," Jack said. "When's the last time we had a genuine crime in Black Gold?"

"When the Tolliver kid and the Jenson kid got drunk up and tried to slip three six-packs out the back door of the grocery," I said. "Nearly a year ago."

"Yeah, well—" Charlie glared at the kid. "What's your name, boy?"

The kid was perched on a barstool with a smirk on his face. "You coots really are something else. I got to tell my friends about this place. My name you get from my attorney and nobody else."

Charlie was the youngest of us, not even sixty yet. He went about twenty, two thirty and had one of those tempers that was slow to blow but you got out of the way when it did.

He placed his pool cue on the felt gently, careful not to scuff it, then he walked up to the kid and lifted him off the stool, placing him down on the floor like he wasn't any heavier than a half-case to go.

"Wax in your ears, son?" he asked softly.

"Lenny Evans," the kid said, grabbing at his wallet for confirmation.

Frank had been trying the sheriff. "Line's busy. Even the emergency number."

"So what are we going to do with him?" Jack wondered out loud.

"We'll throw him in the jail," I suggested.

Everyone but Lenny Evans laughed.

"That relic hasn't been used since 1930," Frank said.

"So it's wood," I said, "but stout as hell. If you buzzards had been out there with me trying to tear out the south side that faces the weather you'd know. Two-by-fours and nails were cheap then. The walls are built up four layers thick, the inner one horizontal, the middle ones diagonal, this way and that, and the outer vertical. All the rot's in the inner layers. You have to tear it *all* out and start from scratch, and with those twelve-pennies pounded in every two inches, about all I have to show for today is two busted saws and a whole bunch of skinned knuckles."

"Take it easy, Ned," Frank said. "Let's not get going on that again. The thing is, can it hold this bird? Hell, even when it was used all it was was a drunk tank."

"It held Hambone Higgins every Saturday night," I replied. "You squirts are too young to remember him, but they'd have to haul Hambone in on a stretcher after a night at Ellie Moran's speakeasy. He'd drink half Ellie's supply, then decide to rearrange the furniture and the other paying customers. It'd take six big men to tie him down and two each, front and rear, to deliver him on the litter."

"Charlie, you're a large fella, but Hambone would make you look malnourished. About three A.M. Hambone'd be done sleeping it off and decide he wanted out. He'd use himself in there as the cue ball in a game of bumper pool. But he never made so much as a dent. Maybe it won't hold Hambone any more, God rest his soul, but it's sound enough to hold Mr. Evans until we can get some law-enforcement service in the morning."

"That's all well and fine, Ned," Jack said, "but what you're proposing is probably illegal."

I asked him, "You want to stay up all night babysitting? I don't."

It was unanimous—except for Lenny Evans, who didn't get a vote. We walked our prisoner three blocks over to the jail. The plan was to move it up to the main street with the other historical buildings after the tearout was done, when it'd be lighter. It was isolated there and we heard a coyote howl.

Lenny began to protest—some folderol about what his lawyer would do when he got ahold of this—but Charlie put an end to that when he assisted him up the steps of the jail by the collar of his shirt.

We had a padlock on the door to begin with, but Frank brought along another to make certain. We locked Evans in, fairly sure he'd be secured until morning.

We were wrong.

It was barely daylight when Frank Henna knocked on the door of my cabin. He was out of breath when I let him in.

"The kid escaped," he stammered.

"Let's go have a look," I said.

Half the town was there ahead of us.

"Over here," Frank said, leading me to the south side, Charlie Blas-

ingame following. The entire south wall was gone, nothing more than a pile of half-rotted rubble.

Charlie studied the situation for a moment, then said, "Let's not get in a stew about it. We have his wallet and his car keys. There's only one road into town, so he has to be hoofing it there or into the woods with the mountain lions. Deputy Hastings is on his way up with a couple more cars. They don't expect it to be long before they have him."

"He's a big kid," Frank said, "but he must be even stronger than he looks. Did all that damage with his bare hands. Had to have."

"Yeah—well, it saved Ned some work, didn't it?" Charlie said.

I just nodded. It wasn't the time to open my mouth, and there was no reason to since the kid had taken my crowbar after he tore out of there. When I'd suggested the jail, I'd remembered that I'd left it inside. A healthy, strapping, desperate kid—I figured he'd try.

Better him than me. It would've taken an old geezer like me a solid week to do all that work, and I knew I wasn't going to get much help, despite the promises made at the meeting.

Classified Continued

(continued from page 128)

PERSONAL—Cont'd

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Coming up, a planned murder . . .

NEVER

by
RON
GOULARD



We weren't expecting a murder. All of us are professional cartoonists and we gather in Westport once a week. Mostly at our regular Inkwell lunch table that particular Monday we'd been talking shop, complaining about magazine editors and newspaper-syndicate executives. The conversation had been relatively sedate and free of violence, until Bud Heinz started telling us about the young tree surgeon who was courting one of his daughters.

Slamming the checkered tabletop with his fist, Heinz said, "Can you imagine a guy who doesn't even read the funny papers? He claims he's never seen my *Seaweed Sam* strip in his entire nitwit life and he's got to be, despite the fact he still has acne, pushing thirty. He thinks maybe he saw a *Seaweed Sam* animated cartoon on television once when—"

"Civilians are that way," observed Hollis as he lit a fresh evil black cigar. "They don't know which came first, the movie, the cartoon, the strip, or—"

"I know damn well which came first!" Heinz fisted the table again, causing the royalty statement he'd been sharing with us to hop up into his empty salad bowl. "Those goniffs at my syndicate kept all subsidiary rights in my strip and when they sold it to that animation outfit I didn't see penny one!"

"Old buddy, you're making waves in my martini," cautioned Ty Banner, rescuing the glass and bringing it up to his lips. "Speaking of the lively arts, have any of you seen *Whizbang II*? I hear it's—"

"He's got vertigo too," growled Heinz.

A frown touched Banner's handsome though slightly puffy face. "Me?"

"The halfwit tree surgeon," said Heinz. "How can you be a successful tree surgeon if you get dizzy whenever you're more than six feet off the ground?"

"Maybe," suggested Zarley, "he can work with a tree nurse. She can do the climbing while he—"

"I think *Whizbang II* is a terrific movie," put in Mert Younger. Mert's in his late sixties, a thick-set guy who looks sort of like an old football coach. Partly retired, he makes a living doing spot drawings for an art service. He manages to join us only once every couple of months. "Of course, I have a somewhat personal interest in that particular character."

"That's right," said Zarley, "you used to work in comic books back in the Golden Age of the Thirties and Forties."

"Golden Age?" Heinz rescued his royalty statement from the salad bowl. "I picked up a few bucks out of comic books back in the 1940s and it was no Golden Age then, believe me. Those publishers were a band of pirates, robbing young artists—"

"You're truly grouchy today," said Hollis, puffing vile smoke in Heinz's direction. "You ought to see somebody about getting tranquilized, Bud."

"I can recommend a good tree surgeon," I said.

Banner asked Mert, "Did you ever draw *Whizbang*?"

He nodded. "On covers mostly. For *Whizbang Comics* and *All Wonder*, from 1939 until about 1943 when I went into the Army."

"Whizbang, the Fastest Man on Earth," said Zarley with a nostalgic smile on his face. "I'm too young for the Golden Age, but I read *Whizbang Comics* when I was a kid in the Fifties. I loved him. He was better than Superman or Batman or any of the others. That neat little sound he made when he was rushing in to fight crime at incredible speed really turned me on. *Zzzzzzippppppp!*"

"I hear Whizbang's still the most successful superhero character going," said Hollis.

"That's right," agreed Mert. "He has been from the start. Those two movies have grossed \$176,000,000 so far."

"All of which," observed Heinz, "goes into the coffers of the publishers."

"Wrong," said Zarley. "I read a piece about the guy who created Whizbang in *People* when I got my hair cut last week. He's a millionaire."

"A multimillionaire," corrected Mert, chuckling. "Yep, Oscar Hunkel has done very well with his Fastest Man on Earth."

"How come he didn't end up like those poor guys who invented Superman?" inquired Heinz, his royalty statement wadding up in his left hand. "How come his publishers didn't treat him like one of the Sabine Women and glom every blessed nickel his hero brought in?"

Scratching at the grey hair over his left ear, Mert replied, "Well, now, there's an interesting story as to why. And I'm probably the only person still alive, besides Oscar, who knows it in full."

Banner grinned and set down his glass. "Tell us, by all means," he invited. "It'll be a great novelty to hear a yarn that isn't given over to lust, violence, and murder."

Mert folded his freckled hands around his coffee cup. "I'm afraid this story involves all three."

"Murder?" Zarley sat up in his chair. "I'm something of a Golden Age comics buff and I don't remember reading about any murder in connection with Oscar Hunkel or *Whizbang Comics*."

Chuckling again, Mert took a sip of his coffee. "This particular anecdote never got into the history books."

"We want to hear it," urged Hollis.

Banner was frowning. "Well, you might as well, Mert," he said, "al-

though for a brief foolish moment there I was expecting to hear a warm tale of sweetness and light while basking in the golden glow of nostalgia.”

“Who wants to hear anything like that?” Zarley put his elbows on the table and leaned toward the older artist. “Let’s hear about that murder.”

Oscar Hunkel was a natural (began Mert). He was a big gawky kid of no more than twenty-two when he got his first steady job cartooning, and he could already draw rings around most of the old-timers in the business. Once in a while you run into a guy who’s simply born with talent. He doesn’t need to sweat over anatomy or perspective, he doesn’t have to swipe. Oscar was like that and on top of it he was a fantastic mimic of other artists’ styles. He could ghost a strip—drawing, lettering, and even the signature—and you’d swear it was authentic. That’s what got him his first real job, which was up at the McNider Syndicate. A second-rate outfit, used to be over on West Forty-third in Manhattan—run by old man McNider, who was about eighty at least and given to screaming at you if you were late over a deadline. Some guys felt uneasy about working up there, but not Oscar. He was always easygoing, a big clumsy Boy Scout type.

He showed the old boy his samples on a spring afternoon in 1938 and McNider, after banging the table in Bud Heinz fashion and getting off a few choice oaths, gave him a staff job right off. Twenty-five bucks a week, which wasn’t that bad in those days. Cartoonists were wilder back then, especially the stable of crumbums who did strips for McNider. They were always either drunk or hungover, or out wenching and getting into saloon brawls. All this outside activity tended to make them miss deadlines quite a lot. Oscar, who was just about the entire bullpen up there, really came to the rescue at such times. He could imitate, right down to the signature in the last panel, every lout who worked for the syndicate.

It was up at McNider that I met Oscar. He was my idol, naturally, since I was almost two years older than he and by no means a natural. Every drawing I made back then was like climbing Everest. But I was a bulldog about sticking to it. No way was I going to end up working in a pants factory like my father and my grandfather and my two fat sisters.

Apparently old McNider felt sorry enough for me to take me on as a sort of glorified office boy. I got a chance to watch Oscar work and to talk to him a lot. He was always a very articulate guy, full of thoughts about the business and what made a successful feature. When Superman hit

and then the other heroes started to appear in 1938 and '39, Oscar said, "They're O.K., but they could be better."

"How?"

"They need a tragic flaw."

Even though he never got beyond the tenth grade, Oscar was full of that stuff. Tragic flaws, pathetic fallacies, falls from greatness. He was bright.

I must be the first person, except maybe Thelma, who saw Whizbang. In between ghosting jobs, working away in those dinky McNider offices until midnight and beyond, Oscar knocked out three weeks of strips. At first he tried to peddle it as a newspaper strip. His drawing was beautiful, as you know—graceful, effortless, and loaded with pretty dames.

Whizbang had a flaw. He was a chronic asthmatic. I think Oscar had a cousin who was too. He never talked much about his private life, not even about Thelma. That's why I'm still not sure how much he knew about her. But I'm getting ahead of myself. The business of the asthma, with Whizbang striving to find a cure for himself and stumbling instead on the secret of how to move as fast as the speed of light is what made his hero stand out in a field that was, at the time, glutted with super guys in trick suits.

Old man McNider wanted no part of Whizbang. "They're all a bunch of damn pansies, swishing around in their long underwear," he told Oscar. "And your hero's sickly on top of it. The public's dumb, but they aren't that dumb. I give this Superman another year. Whizbang you can toss in the garbage right now."

Instead Oscar took his creation to Apex Comics. They had a rundown office in a loft down on Fourth Avenue then. When Oscar went up there Sankowitz the Elder had just kicked off and his pretty-boy son, Hy Sankowitz, was trying to run the company. The empire consisted of a string of faltering pulp magazines with titles like *Cheap Detective Stories*, *Cheap Romances*, *Cheap Terror*, and so on. The late founder believed in laying it on the line. His magazines sold for a nickel less than most and he wanted that right in the title. He had also felt you needed explosive titles for comic books and the Apex line he started just before expiring consisted of *Wham Comics*, *Bam Comics*, *Slam Comics*, and *Bang Comics*. None were exactly thriving.

But Hy had sense enough to realize Whizbang might help his dinky company. Oscar could've taken his feature to a major publisher, but

McNider had almost convinced him it was awful and so he decided to start small and by the end of the day he'd sold *Whizbang* to Hy Sankowitz, been hired to edit a new *Whizbang Comics* for Apex, and signed away all his rights in the character. Hy agreed to pay him twenty-five bucks a page with a five-dollar raise at the end of the first year if they were still in business.

"Whoa," interrupted Heinz. "I thought you claimed your pal, Oscar Hunkel, held onto his rights and is a multimillionaire because of it."

"He got the rights back later," said Mert.

"How?"

"That's part of the story," said Zarley. "Isn't it?"

It is (resumed Mert). Now I better talk about Thelma. She was Oscar's high school sweetheart and as soon as he started earning some real money on *Whizbang* they got married.

Thelma was an absolutely stunning blonde in the Betty Grable, Alice Faye mold, very much a 1940s glamour girl. She wanted to be a singer and became one for a while. Maybe you remember her—Thelma Barr. Her popularity, such as it was, faded out before the Second World War was over. She really was lovely, and fairly bright—but she had a flaw. Well, a couple of them actually.

She was restless. That's a polite word for it. I know she initially really loved Oscar and thought he was a swell guy, but she simply couldn't be faithful. Not while they were supposedly going steady and not even after they were married. Thelma's first professional singing job was with the Eddie Milman Four, a swing group that used to play at a place called Alfie's Hideaway on East Fifty-second street in Manhattan. Thelma managed to have brief romances with all of the Four, including the flugel horn player.

Oscar, on the other hand, was completely faithful and loyal to her. Stone blind, too, when it came to not seeing through the increasingly implausible yarns about where she was when she wasn't home. She could've told him she was delayed because she had to apprehend a gang of Nazi spies who'd just landed in a submarine off Long Island Sound and Oscar would've swallowed it. He really worshipped her, believed she could do no wrong, at least in the first euphoric months of their marriage.

It was an exciting time for him. He was married to the only girl he'd

ever loved and he had a comic book that was selling like Gangbusters. In less than a year *Whizbang Comics* was selling a million copies a month, the syndicates were pleading for a newspaper version, and Metro and Universal were offering stewpots of money for the screen rights.

In January of 1940 Oscar got me a job doing pasteups in the Apex art department. At about the same time he was realizing what a sap he'd been to sign away all rights. Hy Sankowitz wasn't exactly confiding, but he made it clear Apex was doing damn well now and the new success was due entirely to Oscar's Fastest Man on Earth. Hy, by the way, was a fairly amiable guy, not the raging bull his late papa had been. Charming is what he was. So when Oscar began to complain and ask for a heftier share of the profits, Hy took him to a posh restaurant for lunch and, smiling his perfect-teeth smile, said, "Tell you what, kid. We'll raise you another five bucks a page. I'm not obliged to do it, but, hell, you more than deserve it."

Oscar's character was bringing in several million bucks by way of newsstand sales, subsidiary rights, and merchandising. He was pulling down something like \$520 a week—not bad in 1940, yet nothing like what Hy Sankowitz must have been carrying home to his new mansion in Hicksville, Long Island. Being easygoing, though, Oscar didn't want to make a big stink. He just kept plugging away, putting in twelve- and fourteen-hour days at his drawing board. He and Thelma were well enough off to buy a place out in Queens. Brick house with a spare bedroom turned into a studio.

Oscar decided to work at home from then on and he persuaded Hy that I ought to start working out there as his assistant. I'd show up at about ten every morning, sometimes just as Thelma was rolling in from one of her adventures. The alibis she handed him never convinced me and I think the incredulity I couldn't quite keep off my puss must've contributed to Oscar's eventual enlightenment.

One grey spring morning in 1940 Oscar pushed back from his drawing board and said, "I've been wondering, Mert."

"About what?" I worked at a desk facing him. Out the window behind him you could see other brick houses.

"Thelma." He rubbed the stem of his pen across his chin. "Could be I'm merely suffering from hubris, that I envy the success she's been having as a torch singer."

"You're not the envying type."

"I've been wondering if she—well, if she might be two-timing me."

I knew two wasn't anywhere near the right number, but I didn't let on. "All you have to do is look at Thelma to know she loves you, Oscar."

"I've been in love with her ever since she was thirteen and had braces on her teeth."

"You don't have to worry about her," I lied.

"Listen, Mert, if you ever do hear anything, you tell me."

"Sure."

In June of 1940 Star Spangled Studios out in Hollywood paid \$25,000, a hefty sum in those days, for the motion-picture rights to Whizbang. Hy Sankowitz threw a celebration party at the Swan Club. Some execs from the studio were there, along with Curly Horner who was going to play the lead. I got to attend and Thelma was there too. Standing by a potted palm and sipping a gin fizz, which I considered a very sophisticated drink back then, I witnessed Thelma's first encounter with Hy.

"You must be Thelma Barr," he opened, smiling his handsome young tycoon smile. "You're even more beautiful than in the photo Oscar used to keep on his desk."

"Why, thank you, and you're even more handsome than in the photos of you I've been clipping out of the society pages," she replied in that whispery voice of hers.

"You've been saving my pictures? I'm flattered."

"Just for my scrapbook on Oscar's career," she said with a fetching smile. "What other reason would I possibly have?"

So it began.

Hy Sankowitz was, as I've said, a charming, handsome guy. He had an income, thanks mostly to Whizbang, of \$200,000 a year. He had even bought himself a small yacht. Thelma was quite taken with him, so much so that she narrowed her list of other suitors and devoted most of her away-from-Oscar time to him.

Oscar became aware of this particular affair, in part because I began hinting.

About that other flaw of Thelma's. She talked in bed. Some women are silent as a tomb, others are giggly and shy, still others babble. Thelma was a babbler. Not with Oscar—probably because something might slip out that she didn't want him to know—but with most of the others.

That babbling is what gave Sankowitz his idea. She chattered one night

aboard his yacht that was moored on the Sound, about how Oscar was seriously thinking about suing the whole Apex outfit. He wasn't happy that all the movie money was going into their coffers and none of it to him. The five-buck pay hike hadn't done much toward pacifying him. On top of that, Oscar was possibly getting suspicious of her relationship with Hy.

"Oscar's an easygoing palooka most of the time," she said, "but when he gets mad, which I've only seen him do a few times; he can be a demon."

Hy said, "How's this hit you? Let's get rid of Oscar."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'll bump him off."

"But that's—"

"Nope, not the way I'll do it."

"Gee, I don't know."

"Look, he's been griping more and more. I may have to raise him to, geeze, sixty a page and even give him a small hunk of the profits," explained Hy. "If he's dead, however, there's nobody left to complain about what I do with the money."

"But who'd draw and write Whizbang?"

"Any hack out of the bullpen could take over, even that jerk Mert Bunner."

"It's Younger."

"Hum?"

"Mert's last name is Younger not Bunner."

"Bunner, Younger—for thirty bucks a page he'll do as good a job as your husband."

"Oscar's talent is unique and—"

"With him gone, we won't have to be furtive. You can move into the mansion, spend all the time on the yacht you want. We can, if the war doesn't start, travel."

"There's something in your notion," she admitted. "But won't you get caught?"

"Everyone will think it's an accident, believe me, sweetheart."

"Where will this accident happen?"

"I'm inclined to have it happen at the New York World's Fair."

The New York World's Fair was out at Flushing Meadows in Queens. A thousand-plus acres full of exhibits and fancy buildings, most of them

built around a world-of-tomorrow theme. I went out there quite a lot and it really was a terrific fair, not like the rinky dink one they held there in the Sixties. Anyway, the symbol of the fair was this huge ball and this tall skinny pyramid called the Perisphere and Trylon. Inside the big hollow sphere was a vast miniature setup called Democracy, the city of the future. You went inside and circled around the display on a slow-moving walkway. Somewhat corny, I suppose, but damn impressive then.

Somebody at the Fair had approached Hy Sankowitz with the idea of producing a special comic book to be sold exclusively to visitors at the Fair. Various exhibitors would advertise in the magazine, Apex and the Fair would split the profits. Naturally the character to be starred was Whizbang and the magazine was to be titled *Whizbang at the New York World's Fair*.

Leading off was a thirty-page adventure of Oscar's speed demon. To get the backgrounds right Oscar had taken to going out to the grounds and sketching the buildings and the crowds. He decided he wanted a sequence inside the Perisphere, with Whizbang and the villain slugging it out amid the buildings of that miniature city. They'd look immense, like a couple of King Kongs. He persuaded the Fair people to rig a special scaffolding for him up above the two circular walkways. He'd climb up there late at night after the last visitor had taken his last five minute trip into the future.

When Hy decided to do Oscar in, he had that scaffolding in mind. Painstaking when it came to a special job like that, Oscar was planning to spend three or four nights up there doing his sketching. He'd be entirely alone.

Now everyone knew Oscar was sort of clumsy. If he fell off that scaffold and broke his neck nobody would be likely to question it.

That's how Hy put the plan to Thelma that evening on his yacht.

Two nights later Hy was on the fairgrounds ahead of closing. It wasn't too tough to hide in the shrubs until all the crowds had been shooed out. It wasn't tough at all, using a key he'd earlier swiped from an unwitting official, to let himself into the Perisphere. He'd dressed in dark clothes and blended in with the shadows. The future city itself was kept quite bright so that Oscar could draw it, but everything else was dark. Hy skulked slowly—he even had black sneakers on—up the ramp you came down out of there on.

He'd cased it all out on a visit the day before. He knew Oscar liked to perch on the far end of the scaffold, away from the ladder. Holding his breath, Hy started up the dangling rope ladder which led up to the scaffolding. If Oscar heard him too soon there might be trouble, but he was confident he could push him off anyway. He'd shove him off, Oscar would have a fatal fall down into the city of the future.

The ladder made not a sound as he scurried up it. He pulled himself silently onto the scaffolding planks without even causing a noticeable sway. Out at the other end Oscar, apparently oblivious, was whistling as he filled a page of his notebook with quick sketches of the miniature buildings far below.

Unseen and unheard, Hy started to move along the thirty yards separating him from the cartoonist. It was going to work just fine, everything was going to be—

Then he tripped. He stumbled against a guard rail, it gave way, and he went plummeting down, breaking his neck when he smashed into a bridge over a roadway of the future.

Three days after the funeral, Oscar, dressed in a new black suit, appeared at the offices of Apex Comics, Inc. He went into the executive office and showed the two Sankowitz cousins who were going to inherit the company a letter of agreement signed by Hy. The letter, dated two weeks before, gave Oscar back all his rights in Whizbang and the cousins, even after consulting lawyers and handwriting experts, could find no flaw in it. From that moment on, under a new contract which was drawn up, Oscar took 75 percent of gross profits and generously left the rest to Apex.

Zarley straightened up, blinking. "Wait now," he said. "You promised a murder. All you delivered was a planned murder."

Hollis said, "Mert meant the murder of Hy Sankowitz."

"Huh?"

"Hy stumbled," said Mert, "because a dark wire was stretched at ankle level across the catwalk. The fall he had was planned in advance."

"By whom?"

"By Oscar," answered Mert.

Zarley was still frowning. "Before we get into that, explain to me how Oscar got an agreement giving him back his rights and assuring him the life of a multimillionaire."

Mert said, "He forged it. I told you Oscar could imitate anybody's style perfectly. That includes handwriting. He figured, correctly, that with Hy dead no one could prove there hadn't been such an agreement made between them."

Banner tapped at the stem of his martini glass. "You're implying, old buddy, that Oscar Hunkel had prior warning that an attempt was going to be made on his life. Rather than call in the law, he used the occasion to turn the tables."

"That's it, yep."

"But who warned him? Surely Thelma wasn't about—"

"I did," said Mert.

Zarley shook his head. "How the hell did you know?"

The older man rubbed his freckled hands together, studying them as though he expected something to pop out from between them. "As I mentioned, Thelma talked too much to her lovers. She really was a very attractive woman and—well, I have to admit I saw quite a bit of her myself. The day before the murder was to take place she blurted out the details to me."

"And you actually told Oscar?" asked Zarley.

"I didn't have to admit I'd been fooling around with his wife," said Mert. "I just pretended I'd overheard a phone conversation while I was at Apex. Oscar believed me and acted accordingly."

"A difficult moral situation," said Banner. "If you kept quiet, Oscar would die. Yet by telling him you unwittingly contributed to the death of his publisher."

"It was no moral dilemma," said Mert, grinning around at us all. "Hell, it's one thing to fool around with a buddy's wife, but you never side with a publisher against a fellow artist. Never."



There had been a jailbreak at Brandon

OUT IN THE COLD

by
**RICHARD
A. MOORE**



The lake groaned. The deep, somber sound was felt as much as it was heard. It shuddered through my body, touching the hidden corners that hold primeval fears.

Ice. Thousands of feet of ice in four directions and not a few straight down into Lake Dunmore, Vermont. All right, nature freak, enjoy yourself. You love this kind of thing. No walls here in the great outdoors.

Walking across the lake at night, it was easy to imagine you were on

another planet, far from the sun. Ganymede maybe, one of the moons of Saturn. In the night, the absolutely flat terrain seemed even more vast than in the daytime when it sparkled in the winter sunshine. There was no moon tonight, just a million stars and a very few lights from the cabins on the other shore. The mountains loomed on all sides to make me feel even more insignificant.

The lake groaned again as the huge mass of ice shifted, sounding like a prehistoric beast trapped in the depths. I should be getting used to it, but it still spooked me.

The snow had stopped, thank God, but the new six inches made for heavy feet. The wind was picking up by the time I found the cabin. Soon it was roaring like a bossman on a slave ship, all full of rage and not an ounce of pity for anyone standing in the way.

In the cabin, the kindling popped to life with the help of crumpled newspaper. I shoved a damp log into the stove and cursed the Vermont winter, the biting wind, even the groaning lake—go back to sleep, old girl, I'm no longer walking on your grave.

It was shortly after my breath was no longer visible in the cabin that the knock came at the door. I would have heard the sound of a car, so whoever it was had to be walking. That made no sense. Only a fool like me would be out walking on a night like this.

I tried to see through the windows, but between the frost, and the fog from my breath I couldn't make out a thing. Just to be on the safe side, I slipped my pistol into my coat pocket and kept a handy hand on it.

The door open a crack, I said, "What can I do for you?"

Two men were huddled together on the stoop but there was something funny about the way they held themselves. They obviously weren't nature lovers. I looked a bit closer and saw one had handcuffs on.

"I'm a police officer," the other one said. "I've got a prisoner here."

"What the devil are you doing out on a night like this on foot?" I asked.

"My jeep turned over just up the road," he answered. "Let us in, for God's sake."

It still didn't smell right to me, but I backed away from the door and they entered the cabin. The first one in, the one with the handcuffs on, had a bloody spot just above his temple. A goose egg was forming and I could tell he was groggy. The other guy followed him in, holding a pistol on him.

"What's this all about?" I asked.

"Have you heard about the jailbreak at Brandon?" the guy with the gun asked.

I nodded vaguely. "I caught something about it on the news. Several got out, didn't they?" Hell, I knew all about it, but I wasn't going to say that to him. There was something fishy here and until I knew what was going on I was going to keep my little comforter quietly hidden in my pocket.

"A guy named Dave McCann overpowered the guard at the jail. Since he had the keys to the other cells he let all the prisoners go, I guess as a diversion," he told me. "It was a pretty good trick, but not good enough. This here is Dave McCann."

He shoved the man down onto the sofa and placed himself in the chair next to it, resting the hand with the pistol on the arm of the sofa. The groggy one had been listening and was shaking his head in protest.

"Don't listen to him," he said. "I'm the police officer and he's the escapee. I found him wandering on the road and made the arrest. On the way into town he made a grab for me and caused the jeep to turn over. I was stunned in the wreck and he got my gun and the key to the cuffs. He took my coat and put the handcuffs on me."

"Don't swallow that! McCann's famous for his slick moves!" the other man said.

The handcuffed man moved slightly and gasped with pain. One of his hands hung limply from the cuff. I stepped toward him.

"That arm looks broken," I said. "Let me look at it."

When I reached the sofa, I chopped down on the hand holding the gun. It fell to the floor and I grabbed it. "Take it easy, bud.," I told him. "There's no hiding you're one of the escapees."

He rubbed his arm and glared at me. "How did you guess?"

I pointed to his feet. "You've got low-topped shoes on. No police officer going out on a manhunt in this blizzard would wear those things. Your friend here has boots on. You should have taken them when you got the coat. Now get the key out and set him free." Reluctantly, he pulled the key out and manipulated the lock. The police officer gently cradled his bad arm with the good one. "All right, now give me the key."

Once I had it I added, "Now lock the cuffs on yourself." Sullenly he obeyed. "There's no telephone here," I told the policeman. "Is that jeep hopeless?"

He was leaning back on the sofa, taking deep breaths and grimacing

with pain. "In the fight after the wreck," he said, "I managed to throw the keys into the snow. The jeep righted itself after the spill and should be able to run. The rollbar kept damage to a minimum. If you help me to it, I can hotwire it and we can be on our way."

I shook my head. "You're in no condition to be tramping around out there. I can hotwire the damn thing. Just tell me where you left it."

He told me. I handed him his pistol. "Hold this on him and I'll be back with the jeep. You know, I'm surprised I don't recognize you from town."

He took the pistol and smiled at me. "Thanks. I'll hold your boy safe here. You wouldn't know me. I'm not from Brandon. I'm from the next county over. They called in everyone on this search. So many got out at once it was more than the local boys could handle."

"Well, I'll be back in a few minutes," I lied. "It might take me a while in the cold."

"What's your name?" he asked.

It couldn't make any difference now. If the other escapee didn't know me, the cop wouldn't guess it now. In the rush at the jail I had kept my face pretty much hidden out of habit. I was out the door anyway, leaving the deserted cabin for a long jeep ride.

"Just call me Dave," I said.



The Hands Crusade began with a sign in a bombed-out church in Bastogne . . .

THE MESSAGE

by ISAK ROMUN



Someone threw a galley on my desk while I was out to lunch. I picked it up expecting to read a proof of my column. But it wasn't that, it was the obits along with one or two slightly extended writeups on the deaths of the great, the near great, and the forgotten. One of the writeups told me that the last principal of the Hands Crusade had died.

The uncorrected article was brief and to the point.

Dorcia Brand, retired evangelist, died yesterday at the age of 58. She had been a guest at the Farnsworth Rest Home for upwards of a year. Death occurred as a result of an overdose of sleeping tablets.

Ms. Brand had figured prominently in the late Forties as the executive assistant to Buttolph de Strange, leader of the Hands Crusade. De Strange was executed in 1951 for the murder of Harry Gossett at the latter's woodland cabin in California.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

"D, o, r, t, i, a," I muttered. "She spelled it with a t." Absently, I picked up a blue pencil and made the correction.

It was that galley, that writeup, that convinced me I should prepare this account. I suppose the brief two-paragraphs-plus-a-line made the next edition. I never checked.

It wouldn't have mattered whether it made the next edition or not. Almost no one remembered Dortia Brand and few, I imagine, remembered de Strange. But between 1947 and 1950 those two shook up the country, were on the brink of turning it around as Butch de Strange promised he would. I wonder, futilely now, if he could have pulled it off if the then inexplicable and seemingly motiveless murder of Gossett hadn't brought the whole thing crashing down.

The story really starts back in January 1945 in a battered winter-whitened town called Bastogne. I won't go into that part of it; even those who weren't around then know about the Battle of the Bulge. Suffice to say that Butch was in one of Patton's tanks, speeding to relieve that nearly crushed outpost of American resistance.

From all accounts, and from his own story in a Crusade handout, Butch was not an atypical GI. Maybe more the happy heathen, but generally average. He drank, he caroused, he wenched, but unlike most of his olive-drab peers he didn't feel accountably contrite about it when it came time to move out and face Jerry. He wrote that he used to kid the Catholic boys as they stood in line for confession before a move-up or a push. After Jerry, though, it was back to fun and games for Butch, for the boys in line, for everyone.

In England, where de Strange staged before Normandy, there was plenty enough to turn the golden-haired head of a Stateside country type,

particularly if predisposed. But in France's liberated cities, in the food-hungry and grateful towns between the cities, there were unlimited opportunities for a handsome swaggerer to swill deeply at life's trough. Until it was time once again to persuade the Wehrmacht to give up yet more real estate.

That was how it was with thousands of GI's, including Butch de Strange, until de Strange got to Bastogne.

We can only speculate now that there had to be a buildup, that the inconsistency between the rest-and-recreation life and the life up front must have made its impression on Butch. The suffering had to have helped too—the drained, wan faces, the emaciated bodies, the towns without young men, the ruins, the necessity and idiocy of war. By the time he reached Bastogne, it seems, given a sensitivity of which even he was unaware, Technical Sergeant Butch de Strange was separated by miles of subtle and unexpected changes from the Corporal Buttolph de Strange who light-years before had crashed ashore at Omaha Beach.

How Bastogne must have looked to him as his tank pushed toward it, I don't know. I was inside the town and saw it from that viewpoint. The sun had broken through on that day of deliverance. Earlier, C-47s had flown over and dropped us the wherewithal—the food, ammo, and plasma—to hold out a while longer as we awaited arrival of Patton's tanks.

The town was desolation itself and I remember wondering why the ragged remains of our division bothered hanging on to it at all. It was a scene of death, the townspeople and soldiers shuffling about, the dead seeking rest. The only thing that seemed alive was the noise; the empty popping sound of small-arms fire, the overhead swish of incoming artillery, the crash of shells tearing apart an already torn-apart town. If there was anyplace back in 1945 that could have reaffirmed an atheist in his belief that there was no guiding intelligence directing the world, that place had to be Bastogne.

Well, that was Bastogne as it looked to me, and I suppose something of the same impression was made upon de Strange. I didn't meet Butch there. By the time he got to Bastogne I was, thankfully, trudging to the rear on frostbitten feet—my ticket Stateside—as the liberating tanks came roaring into and through the town and out toward the German perimeter.

But not all the tanks went roaring through. Butch's didn't. It broke down beside a small, almost leveled church. And while the driver was

trying out a little first-echelon maintenance on the engine Butch got down, dropped his helmet on a tread guard, and went into the building.

Later he was to assert it was more than coincidence, that something caused the tank to break down and led him into the church. He held, no doubt honestly, that he could remember no reason—curiosity or even the desire to get in out of the cold—for going inside the tottering structure. Surely it wasn't devotion; he had shown little enough of that in his life. All he knew, or so he contended, was that he got down from the tank, dropped his helmet, and went in.

Once in the church, he saw nearly total destruction. Nothing was whole. Candle racks were twisted, turned on their sides. One wall had crumbled. On two of the others the Stations of the Cross were burned frames or shattered heaps below the shadow areas from which the plaster had fallen. Against the third wall, the altars stood—or had stood. The main altar was gone, a gaping hole in the wall opening onto a littered yard beyond. One of the side altars was a mound of rubble. Only the right-hand altar still stood, pocked and chipped and peeling. Its statue, God the Father, blackened and broken but still recognizable, stood in its niche, arms outstretched to the faithful—arms without hands, for they had been blasted away. A double amputee, true to the times.

But what held Butch's attention was a crudely lettered sign, the unknown effort of some dogface. The sign was hung from the statue's neck by a rope—the kind that came with the issue shelter-half—and read:

I HAVE NO HANDS
BUT YOURS

In one of the late-night sessions I used to have with Butch after I got the assignment to dig into his Crusade he told me of his mental turbulence at that moment. Thoughts tumbled over each other, the new struggling to displace the old. The whole statement burned itself into his consciousness, but the word YOURS kept repeating itself in his thoughts, a riotous mix of the aural and visual.

He couldn't recall how long he stood rereading that sign, wholly, in part, word by word (YOURS! YOURS! YOURS!), his mind drawing back from the message like a child avoiding bitter medicine.

Butch said he wrestled there, resisting what he later acknowledged to be a clear challenge. He turned away from the statue and its sign, almost

wrenched himself away, telling himself he needed time to think through this new and unbidden experience.

He got it—more input to the later Crusade mythos. As he stepped from the church, a German shell hit his tank, demolished it, killed his crew, and completed the job of reducing the church to tumbled stones and granulated plaster. Butch received a light hit, a piece of metal through his thigh. Light but disabling. Enough to knock him down, put him out, and mark him for an extended period of convalescence at some rear-area hospital. Plenty of time to think.

He awoke in a Belgian hospital managed by a religious order. So it isn't surprising that the first thing he saw was a crucifix tacked to the wall opposite his bed. At that moment of waking he didn't know that nuns ran the hospital, and his sight wasn't too good, so what his tortured mind saw was the cruciform centered in a rosette of light, framed by haze. It was as if he were looking down a long dark tunnel at the end of which salvation beckoned.

Shutting his eyes didn't help. This new image was burned behind the lids. That was when, he told me later, he gave himself over to The Message. In that hospital bed, the Hands Crusade was born.

When he at last opened his eyes the room fell into focus and the crucifix was just that—a crucifix on a wall. But this realization didn't turn him around; The Message had gotten through. Butch de Strange was converted. Born again, as we say nowadays.

He noticed there were others in the hospital room and that a second lieutenant, turned out in a nurse's crisp whiteness, was standing beside his bed with an oral thermometer.

"You'll be all right," she said. "Open up."

"I know," he said, and opened up.

That's how he met Dortia Brand, then a twenty-six-year-old officer and gentlewoman, by Act of Congress, of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. The Army medics had taken over the Belgian hospital, which explained Dortia's presence among the wimples, veils, and flowing skirts.

I can't believe there was instant communication between Butch and Dortia, some immediate understanding that bound them together in what he saw now to be his work, but they contended that some such thing happened. I prefer to lay whatever link was forged between them as resulting from the long-into-the-night discussions she would later describe

as “revelatory.” From the Crusade accounts, they spent those hours hammering out the consequences of The Message and planning the structure of the organization that would bring it to a waiting, war-sickened world.

They started in the States about a year after they both left the Army. They had (correctly) assessed the need for the Hands Crusade and the efficacy of The Message, however it was they framed it. Shortly after opening shop they attracted hundreds, then thousands. Their base of operations was right here in Paulsburg and one day my editor called me in and gave me the assignment.

“Monahan, do you know anything about this Hands Crusade?” he asked.

“No,” I said.

“This guy, de Strange. He preaches commitment and service, then sends everyone back to their own church.”

“Is that bad?”

“I don’t know. He may have something up his sleeve. See if there’s an angle.”

That’s how I met de Strange and Dortia. We got along from the first, were on a first-name basis at the start, though I’m not too keen on people calling me Oscar. I had to break off an ongoing exchange of European war stories so I could get around to telling them my main purpose in being there was to expose the Hands Crusade if I could. Their reaction to that was strange; there wasn’t any. They continued to be warm and congenial and even offered to help me peek into every nook and cranny. I said thanks, I’d find my own nooks and crannies. But I did accept a guided tour of their plant.

- It was a quick walk-through because there wasn’t much to it and what there was was incredibly shoddy—a few unpainted offices with furniture that looked like Salvation Army rejects. The only decorations were religious pictures and here and there the official Crusade poster showing the handless God and The Message: I HAVE NO HANDS BUT YOURS. In each office, two or three hungry-looking individuals checked mailing lists, stuffed envelopes, drew up speaking itineraries, and did those things people out to save the world do.

I asked questions and got ready answers. The money came from a handful of well-to-do individuals, just enough to keep the headquarters operational, provide the volunteers with meals that made Army K rations

look like something from the kitchens of the Ritz, and finance, by cheapest common carrier, the increasing number of trips de Strange was making.

"It looks clean," I told my editor.

"How about de Strange and that girl? You know."

"No."

I must have sounded defensive because he smiled, overly wisely, I thought. "There's some payoff, Monahan. Dig."

"There's no digging to be done here. Not in Paulsburg. The big rallies are over here. But he goes on the road next week."

"Follow him," my editor said, the smile staying.

I got to know de Strange even better on those road trips. He was a hulk of a man, but like many big men he was graceful in movement and gesture. Since the war he had sprouted a thick beard that seemed to fit his new character; all he needed were a robe and a couple of stone tablets. His eyes were deep, piercing, seeking—eyes that had seen, and read The Message.

And there was his voice, a virtuoso instrument. Yet it had no flash value; it wasn't employed to awe people into belief. The Message was pure exposition, delivered clearly and with conviction. A session would usually end with a simple, "Go, be His hands." There might be a hymn or two as the commitment cards were signed if Dortia, who acted as advance agent, could scare up a volunteer chorus or band.

That was it then, I concluded. The operation was clean, no one was on the take, no one wanted to exploit anything or anyone. It was just a pure, simple message. It seemed too good to be true, and I could understand my editor's skepticism, but I believed Butch when he said he wanted to change people within themselves and through existing institutions. He didn't want to tear anything down, merely to strengthen it. He was building temples, he told me. Every commitment card was the blueprint for a temple.

And that's the way I wrote it; nothing exciting, but the truth.

That was in 1947 and that's when Butch and I parted company. He and Dortia went on to other rallies, other cities, collecting commitment cards, and I went on to new stories.

It wasn't until three years later that our paths crossed again. In mid-

1950 the wire services gave us the bare bones of a story about Butch de Strange. He had traveled to California, presumably to seek out a man named Harry Gossett. He had traced Gossett to an area near a small town in the Rockies foothills. He had stayed one night in a hotel in that town, asked around about Gossett, and the next day trudged up the hills to Gossett's cabin. The day after that he was back in town, closeted in his hotel room, where he stayed for four days until they came to get him. Gossett's body had been found, his head parted with a hatchet found in the cabin and later identified as belonging to de Strange. Some items of small value missing from Gossett's cabin were found in de Strange's hotel room. Butch was being held on murder one.

I remember registering incredulity. This wasn't the de Strange I knew and had traveled with. In the three years between 1947 and 1950 the Crusade had become big, had developed into a force. De Strange was getting to the people who counted, people in elective office, people strong in industry and the unions, people who could really put The Message to work. And then the leader blew it all with murder and petty theft. It was unbelievable.

But I had other things on my mind then—the chance for a column, the possibility of syndication, a professional interest in something that had just started up in Korea. De Strange and his troubles occupied little of my time or my thoughts until some months later when my editor summoned me.

"You got to know this de Strange pretty well," he said.

"Pretty well. Back then."

"I want you to cover his trial."

"I'm not sure I want to."

"A story like this can make it for you, Monahan—give you a lock on that column."

So I covered the trial.

Not that it was much of a trial. Butch didn't want counsel, so counsel was appointed. Butch wouldn't cooperate, wanted to plead guilty, so a plea of Not Guilty was entered for him.

The young, court-appointed defense counsel did all he could for him, but Butch did precious little for him. The lawyer tried for insanity but it wouldn't stick. The prosecutor's case was very strong. De Strange journeyed to that foothills town seeking out Harry Gossett. He set out with the death weapon strapped to his belt. Gossett's valuables, minor

indeed, were found in de Strange's room. The jury was out a shamefully short time.

That night I got word that Butch wanted to see me. I had been reporting the trial from the press table, and though we had never gotten together he must have noticed me there. In one of his brief statements, he had said he would talk to no one. I hadn't tried to get to him—not out of delicacy but because I knew that when he said something he meant it.

Now he wanted to talk to *me*. Any reporter would have gladly donated to charity the bonus he would surely get for an exclusive interview with Buttolph de Strange. Yet I was reluctant to go.

Reluctant, but not crazy. I went.

He hadn't changed much. Except for the eyes. They were kind of drawn-in and watery. Why not, I thought—he must know of the reports. The Crusade was falling apart. Gossett's murder was too off-trail, too puzzling. And Butch had offered no explanations. The Crusaders had been prepared for anything but weakness from de Strange; they weren't ready for the revelation that he was, after all, human. No one stepped in to take over. Even Dortia Brand failed. She was found early one morning in her bathroom with both wrists slashed—a suicide attempt thwarted then only to succeed decades later.

After half-hearted greetings, I asked Butch about the breakup of the Hands Crusade.

"It would have happened anyway," he said.

"I don't understand. What does that mean?" I asked him.

When he didn't answer, I asked why he sent for me if he wasn't going to talk.

"For old times' sake, Oscar. We had some good sessions back then, some good talks. And you were fair—you didn't find things where there was nothing to find. Even though you didn't—couldn't—find anything wrong, you might have written a funny story, poked fun at the Crusade. You didn't. Others weren't so charitable." He turned those watery eyes on me. "Why did I send for you? Do they still call them scoops?"

"Our younger people sometimes do."

"I want to give you a scoop."

"O.K. give me the details."

He thought a while, then said, "How will a step-by-step account of the murder do? The anatomy of a killing, something like that?"

I replied that that would do nicely. I was right too. Because of that

story, I'm told, I almost won a Pulitzer. I also got the column, wide syndication, lots of visibility. That interview was my making in spite of the fact that I was dissatisfied with it. It merely reinforced the illogic of Butch's act. I told him that, told him the story was short on motive.

"That's all you can print—what I told you," he said. "For now, anyway. If I told you more, could you keep it under wraps at least until the Crusade is forgotten, until all this is just so much uninteresting history?"

"Off the record? Sure. But don't tell me anything you don't want to tell me."

He looked grim. "I have to tell someone. So *someone* will know why I did it. Before I'm a dead man."

"There are appeals."

"Not for me."

"At least one is automatic. Isn't that the way it works?"

"Maybe, but it won't change things."

"You want to die."

"Yes. For what I did to Gossett. No one has that right. I found that out in Europe. You must know I fixed the trail that led them to me."

"Why?"

"I stole those things to cover up the real reason I killed him. The hatchet was just a woodsman's tool. When I started out, I had no thought of using it that way. Do you know who Gossett was? Can you guess?"

I shook my head, but in my mind I examined the possibility that Gossett had succeeded where others had failed and had dug up something about Butch and Dortia.

But it wasn't that. Butch explained. "He's the one who painted that sign and hung it on the statue. I've been trying since the beginning of the Crusade to find that man. I had expected him to come forward of his own free will and share the triumph of the Crusade with me. A number of men claimed to have hung the sign but their stories didn't check. But I had been getting leads, piecing them together, until Gossett's name surfaced. No one else knew—only I knew. People gave me bits of information but only I put them all together and got Harry Gossett. It was fairly easy to trace him once I had his name.

"So I went to that town, hiked up to his cabin, met him, and laid before him the prospect of his full partnership in the Crusade. He said yes, he had made the sign, and that he had recently vowed to connect with the

Crusade and make a statement to the press. But then he laughed, Oscar, and he told me why.

"I never realized that The Message could have more than one meaning, that you could read those words at least two ways and that I had read them only one. Gossett told me his—that the hands were the hands of man. Even before they were broken off. That the sign could have read just as well: I HAVE NO HANDS BUT YOURS BECAUSE I AM YOURS—YOUR INVENTION. Man made God—man is God. Oscar, Gossett didn't believe!"

We talked a while longer, de Strange using the time arguing that he had done what he had done in an effort to protect the Crusade from Gossett. But even then, exposed to Butch de Strange's persuasive powers, that wouldn't wash. It was a copout. The Crusade would fail in any case. He could have explained Gossett away, said that God even worked through unbelievers, and so on. No, he killed Gossett for another reason, one he wasn't telling me—perhaps wasn't telling himself.

I'm reminded of something the Frenchman, Jean Guiton, wrote: What lies deepest in me, I believe in a horror of premature certitudes, of beliefs and unbeliefs too hurriedly adopted.

De Strange didn't want to die, as he said, because of what he did to Gossett. He wanted to die because of what Gossett did to him.

For just as the sign in that lost Bastogne church had, in an instant, changed Butch de Strange from heathen to Crusader, so had the truth, the substance of an atheist's sick humor, returned Butch, full circle, to his former condition. A condition he was forced to accept, but with which he couldn't live.

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Sergeant Plodd was all for matching jeans and knitted twin sets . . .

The Once-in-a-lifetime Dress

by
Caryl
Brahm



It had been a once-in-a-lifetime dress. Cheryl had bought it at the fabulously fashionable boutique down by the harbor in Cannes with the five hundred pounds Uncle Torquemada had left her in his otherwise disappointing will. It was the kind of dress that rattled like a maraca as she walked and looked as though it had been left out in a shower of diamonds and sequins and baroque pearls. It weighed a ton and she would have known it anywhere.

The last time Cheryl had feasted her eyes on the once-in-a-lifetime was when she was packing it tenderly in the suitcase at the Hôtel Méditerranée. At home, when she unpacked, there was but one detached baroque pearl where the once-in-a-lifetime should have lain. And it was *unique au monde*, the great Gustave himself had said so, and the man at the Customs bench with the enigmatic smile had fully endorsed Gustave's claim.

"I'd know it anywhere," she told Monty. "It was my Christmas present to me."

"What? In August?" Monty had mumbled.

And that was how Cheryl hadn't a thing to wear to the Van Umberson's ruby—well, garnet—wedding anniversary. And the Barrington-Smiths would be there—charming people, it was generally conceded, newly moved into Clovelly Towers, and as rich as Croesus, whoever he may have been—it was Greek to Cheryl—and first impressions were so important.

Ironical really that the important first impression Cheryl received from the fabulous Tracy Barrington-Smith was that she was wearing her *unique au monde* Gustave model, minus one baroque pearl.

"Ullo! Ullo! Ullo, Ullo, Ullo!" Sergeant Plodd of Bow Street was shouting down the telephone at abroad with his customary dogged persistence. Well, he had to make himself understood at the froggy end, didn't he?

Some old bird had caught some other old bird wearing her gear, so far as he could make out, and it had to happen on his stint of duty, didn't it? His own good lady, who wore her hair in curlers all week long, the better to emerge with it in crisp but unconvincing curls on Saturday night, her Bingo night, wore matching jeans and knitted twin sets, very neat, very tasteful, very inconspicuous and a pity there weren't more women like her. There were, of course. Exactly like her. All in matching jeans and twin sets, which strongly suggested that Sergeant Plodd was not perhaps the best qualified man on the Bow Street to sort out the problem of the unic tunic.

At the other end of the line the great Gustave was holding the receiver well away from his shell-like.

"*Mais si! Mais si!*" he confirmed. "*Unique au monde.*" It seemed that he had created this gorgeous but discreet little number for Princess Caroline of Monaco and though her mum totally approved of her daughter's

gown for once, it had not suited Princess Caroline's own taste. "It stifles me," she had complained and had tugged at the neck and blown down herself.

"She 'ad the bloody nerve," said the great Gustave, lapsing into his native cockney, to send my creation back!"

"Oh, well, I'll just have to work it out, won't I?" said Sergeant Plodd, terminating this fascinating glimpse of the behavior of froggy royalty to its dressmakers. So unlike that of our own dear Princess Anne.

"The thing is," he pursued, "this bird—" he consulted his notes—"Mrs. Monty Mitchell says she got 'er unic tunic off of you. Says she'd know it anywhere."

"Si, si, bien sure!" said the great Gustave. "I unloaded it on her all right. You should have seen 'er in it—had us in the aisles after she left."

"As I said, I'll have to trudge it out, won't I?"

Tracy Barrington-Smith was not in the most placatory of moods when Sergeant Plodd of Bow Street called at Clovelly Towers the following morning. Not even her recourse to the bottle of gin (glug-glug-glug) had shed a rosy hue over the failure of her show-jumper to show-jump at Hickstead even though—or possibly because—her daughter Tessa was riding. And then the ridiculous business of the dress the night before with that appalling, common woman who had nearly torn it off her back last night.

"She must have been mad," she said to Sergeant Plodd's slowly moving ballpoint. "I mean, what would she have looked like in it?"

"'Orrible," said the ingratiating Plodd. "I don't know why more of you ladies don't dress like my good lady—matching jeans and knitted twin sets. Very neat. Very tasteful. Very inconspicuous."

"We do," snapped Tracy Barrington-Smith crisply, "on the correct occasions." She upped her morals with another glug-glug-glug, then somewhat waveringly endeavored to point the bottle in the general direction of the sergeant, who shook a sad head.

"Not while I'm on duty," he declined virtuously. "Now about this unic tunic—may I inquire how you came to obtain it?"

"It was a pressie. From a very close admirer in the wine trade. My 'constant companion.' Only don't tell—"

"—your good husband?"

"Course not, silly. Don't tell Nigel Dempster." Glug. Glug.

On the bulletin board of the Bow Street Police Station one of the lady traffic wardens, the one who had hung onto her ideals in spite of her behind, easily the most provocative thing about her and she knew it, was affixing a quotation from her favorite poet Kipling:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds worth of distance run
Yours is the world and everything that's in it
And what is more, you'll be a (police)man, my son.

Sergeant Plodd, passing the lady warden's erogenous zone as she bent to affix the poem with a drawing pin, was too dispirited even to give it a nip for luck. Trudge, trudge, trudge all morning, with never a sequin in sight, the traffic being what it was, is, and most likely ever will be, and Sergeant Plodd not of the shape to dodge about on a moped with the clue to the unic tunic tantalizingly one suspect ahead of him.

First the ginned-up old bird's constant companion, a smooth-speaking cock-sparrow who looked like he'd been steeped in a barrel of brilliantine told him he'd sent his pretty secretary to some Chelsea boutique where the unic tunic had caught his constant companion's eye, to buy it whatever it cost as a surprise for her. Time had taught the brilliantined cock-sparrow that his constant companions were equally susceptible to surprises that must be constantly supplied or else.

So it was trudge, trudge, trudge to the Chelsea boutique for Plodd of Bow Street.

Once, the good sergeant ruminated, shouldering his way to the boutique not a bull's-eye beam from the King's Road, it was rank starlets and the charm school. Nice and ladylike. But look around you now and all you got was two-tone hair and T-shirts. And if, like the highly respectable policeman you were, you were not into punks, you could turn for charm to Danny la Rue or Dame Edna, neither of whom were the copper's cuppa. Give him his own good lady of a Bingo night, neat and matching and— Here the burly Plodd found himself swept off the pavement and face forward into a desperation of honking Chelsea traffic.

But there was nothing to complain about in the enormous blue eyes and poker-straight honey-colored hair of the salesperson at the boutique who instantly laid aside her copy of *Horse and Hound* when he loomed

in the doorway. She turned two azure searchlights on him. He produced the inevitable unic tunic.

Azure Eyes drew in a deep breath—it had to last her to the end of what she had to say.

Yes, she had seen the frightful thing before, in fact to be totally truthful she had actually worn it—it weighed a ton—at that gala Daddy had taken her to at Gstaad, the frumpish being the in-thing that month. Where had she bought it? Well, to be totally truthful she hadn't actually *bought* it but had kind of borrowed it from Lala who'd borrowed it from Mattiwilda Mae, then Lala had gone insane about a Matisse—at least the man with the barrow in the Portobello Road *said* it was a Matisse—and they don't grow on trees, do they?

Here Azure Eyes paused for breath and Plodd of Bow Street rubbed his aching wrist. But before anything like long enough Azure Eyes had drawn another breath and was off again. It seemed that to acquire a Matisse you needed actual money. Honestly, how sordid could you get? And Lala needed the Matisse to sell again at the Caledonian market or somewhere equally inaccessible. And when she had actually sold it she could pay for the tunic—totally suitable for some old frump *last* month when frumps were still in but totally *hopeless* for this season—and settle everyone's debts. *And* leave enough left over to fly the Concorde to New York. Azure Eyes drew in another breath. So who could blame Plodd if he folded his notebook like an Arab and silently stole away.

But not, of course, before ascertaining the address of Mattiwilda Mae. Sergeant Plodd was not known to the readers of *Private Eye* as the brightest brain of Bow Street for peanuts.

For the next three days he kept head-down to the trail. Who was it said "Dogged does it?" Must have been Dr. Watson in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Mind you, that trail had its compensations—Mattiwilda Mae being high on the goodies list. She was a copper-bottomed topless Chantooze and Dansoose and coal-black with it. She worked at the Wimbledon Lunchtime Exoticorama, where she and her back-up group did bumps and grinds and belly rolls and Chantoozed something saucy in French to finish off the first half, which Sergeant Plodd was to remember for years, especially of a Saturday night when he was into the beer with tears.

Mattiwilda Mae duly identified the unic tunic. It had, she said, fallen

off the back of a lorry and somewhat surprisingly straight into a pub, The Blair Arms, kept by an ex-ballet boy who—

—though he could tell at a glance that Plodd was unlikely to become one of his regulars and he had not himself set eyes on the unic tunic before was quite explicit in his directions.

Go, he said, straight to Heathrow Airport and ask one of the girls at Reception for Denis.

The trim little lady in the perky cap and the well kept uniform at Reception reminded Sergeant Plodd of his own good lady when they first met, her being a wartime bus conductress on a Number 30 bus. Those were days when conductresses wore uniforms. Sergeant Plodd approved of women in uniform.

“Denis?” said Perky Cap. She pondered. “Denis?” Plodd produced the unic tunic. It struck a chord. “Oh, you mean *Denis!*” she exclaimed. “Denis-no-Menace! The last time I saw that Denis-no-Menace was wearing it at one of his soirees. You ask him.”

“But—but—” Plodd of Bow Street floundered.

“You’ll recognize him easily—he’s the one with the enigmatic smile,” Perky Cap assured him.

“Accompany you to Bow Street” said Denis-no-Menace, looking at the unic tunic Sergeant Plodd was holding out for identification. One look had sufficed to wipe the enigmatic smile off his face.

“Oh, well, it was worth it,” he said, resigned.

“But,” said Cheryl Mitchell, holding well away from her the unic tunic restored to her by Sergeant Banner, together with a trudge-by-trudge account of his tracking it down, “I couldn’t wear this—this *thing*—after so many people have worn it. Besides,” she added inconsequentially, “I’ve applied for the maximum insurance claim. Here—” she extended the offending garment between finger and thumb “—give it to the dustman. It might do for his old mother or wife or—” she said, inspired “—you might like it for your wife.”

Plodd of Bow Street snapped his notebook to and folded the unic tunic carefully. Well, it would make a change from the matching jeans and knitted twin set, wouldn’t it?

The take was a grand short, but they could smooth that over . . .

MURRO'S OTHER ENTERPRISES



by **CARROLL MAYERS**

It was a beautiful day when Lou and I left our pad that morning. The sun was beaming, the sky was cloudless, and songbirds were everywhere. That's a little flowery, sure, but when it's your first day as special agents for Big Max Murro it's hard to stifle rampant euphoria.

In truth, "special agents" is a bit heavy too. Actually, we were trouble shooters for whatever came up. Six weeks ago my scam partner and I had

tried to pull a short-change dodge on one of the bartenders in Murro's Royal Lounge only to be tabbed by Big Max himself.

That had been a bad scene: Lou assayed a "no defense" tack to get off the hook. "It was just a chance we took, Mr. Murro. You know how it is. When opportunity knocks—"

Big Max hadn't bought that and had summoned a pair of gorillas named Michaels and Renzo to so-impress us. After the calisthenics, though, he told us he *had* been intrigued by our audacity and wondered if we'd care to stay on as gofers, maybe work our way up. Thus our start with Murro's organization. And last night he'd informed us of our new status.

We had decided the first peon we'd overawe would be that same bar-keep, a character named Cleary. Lou made it supremely casual when we sauntered in shortly after ten.

"A brace of brews, fella."

"Eh?"

"Two beers, Cleary. And a little hustle. We're on a tight schedule."

The man gave the mahogany a swipe with his bag rag. "You're the guys who'd better move it. Mr. Murro's been on the horn every ten minutes the past hour yammering for you."

A couple of those songbirds quit warbling. To date, Lou and I were unaware of the extent of Murro's multiple enterprises, but we had no illusions as to his penchant for physical response when irked. Michaels and Renzo had underscored that.

"We'd better get back there, Ernie," Lou said hastily.

I already was five steps ahead of him.

Murro was a jowly heavy-set citizen given to gaudy cravats that clashed with his expensive suiting. He was smiling behind an expansive glass-topped desk when we entered his sanctum, and some of my apprehension eased—until I noted the smile didn't reflect in his cold grey eyes. My chest got even tighter when Big Max pointedly eyed his diamond-studded strap watch.

I said quickly, "We're sorry, Mr. Murro. We overslept."

Lou felt emphasis was in order. "That's right, sir. We overslept."

Patently, under circumstances he considered less urgent, our employer would have voiced strong opinion of our lame excuse. As it was, aware we'd appreciated the watch bit, he launched immediately into the matter at hand.

That matter, in a word, was a dilly. As bookkeeper and accountant for

his organization, Murro employed one Felix Tipton. For reasons known only to himself, Tipton apparently had decided to terminate his employment and take along some thirty-two thousand dollars as severance pay. He had last been seen some twelve hours ago and had checked out of his rooming house.

"I want that dough recovered," Big Max thundered. He tossed a roll of bills on the desk. "There's expense money. Get on this and stay on it until you run down that little weasel."

Lou and I traded uncertain glances. I ventured, "And then?"

Murro glared at me. "Put him in an emergency ward if you feel like it, I don't care—just bring back that cash!"

Lou said, "Yes, sir." Then he stopped, tonguing his lips. "Only—"

Murro's icy gaze swiveled. "Only what?"

I sensed Lou's "only" had been a prelude to "but where do we start?" Fortunately, he checked himself in time. Murro truly would have exploded at the query.

"Nothing, sir," Lou said. He pocketed the bills and swung toward me. "Let's get going."

I couldn't have concurred more. Anything to get clear of Murro's seething wrath. For all our fast exit, though, Big Max shot us a final admonition. "And keep me posted!"

So there it was, our first assignment. Going back through the lounge, the fact that we were shaken, groping for a handle, was obvious to Cleary. The barkeep built a sneering smile. "Have a nice day, gentlemen," he told us.

We ignored him. What we couldn't ignore was the necessity for immediate action. How and where to start running down Tipton was an enigma, but we had to do something. And Big Max wouldn't look favorably on our sitting around the lounge while we pondered what that something might be.

We had maintained a battered Chevy sedan for our scam operations and had held onto it after hiring on with Murro, so we drove to a small coffee pot down the street. Then it was skull-cracking time. Lou picked up the intimation I'd sensed. "So where *do* we start?" he asked.

I could conceive of only one ploy. "Public transportation," I said. "If Tipton's left his lodgings, he's likely skipped town. If he went by private

car we're dead. But maybe he took a bus, a plane, or a train. If we check those terminals we might get lucky and pick up a lead."

Lou frowned. "He could have taken a taxi."

"We should check cab ranks too," I said. I eyed the wall clock. "Meet me back here in two hours. You drive out to the airport, I'll tackle the bus and train stations. If we don't score with any of those we'll do the cab stands together."

The bus and rail depots were only three blocks apart—walking to both was no problem. But I could have saved the shoe leather. No ticket agent at either site could recall anyone of Tipton's description buying passage.

Later back at the coffee pot, Lou reported similar lack of success. And subsequent visits to a dozen taxi stands near both the Royal Lounge and Tipton's former rooming house proved equally fruitless. "Now what?" Lou asked.

"I don't know," I said, "but we've got to come up with something. Until we do, maybe it would be a good idea to hole up out of town a ways. Murro may check our pad. When he finds we're not there he may believe we're hot on some out-of-state lead."

Lou grunted. "He said to keep him posted."

That wasn't a happy thought. "We'll do that," I said. "Somehow."

The Freeway Motel was five miles out on the Interstate. We checked into a unit twenty minutes later and spent the rest of the day and night trying to determine what to do next. We came up with zilch, which wasn't conducive to a good night's rest.

In the morning, though, Lou did have one idea. Murro had ascertained that Tipton had abandoned his lodgings. But suppose the bookkeeper had been smart, checked out only temporarily, then moved back in again? He could hole up there indefinitely until he figured he could really make a break.

Lou's notion wasn't much, but it was at least an angle to latch onto. Even though it might negate our motel play with word of our still jockeying around town getting back to Big Max, we went ahead.

Our hopes never got off the ground. Tipton had definitely fled, and since his rent had been up to date his landlady couldn't have cared less. True, she did give us a list of his associates and haunts she'd learned of but it was damned brief—Tipton had obviously been pretty much of a loner—and two days of running them down yielded nothing.

The third night, back at the motel, Lou was ready to pack it in and report back to Murro we'd struck out. "What else can we do, Ern?"

I said, "Without Blue Cross, that's the one thing we can't tell him."

His assent was glum. "I know." Abruptly he brightened. "We could take off ourselves. Right now. From here. Forget Murro, the whole bit."

We could, of course. But up to this Tipton caper, working for Murro hadn't been all that bad. He *had* favored us, moved us along. I pointed that out to Lou.

"What about that progress report?" he countered. "Murro'll be expecting one about now."

I had a sudden inspiration. "We fake it," I said.

"Eh?"

"Like this," I said. Then, before my nerve died, I grabbed the phone, called the Royal Lounge, and got Murro.

When he came on I talked fast, with little preamble. "This's Ernie, Mr. Murro. Lou and I are in Cleveland, at the airport. Tipton's skipping around. We just traced him here, learned he caught a flight to Houston this morning. We're already booked for tomorrow. We wanted to keep you posted like you said—"

I must've sounded convincing. "Good work," he said after a question or two. "Call me tomorrow."

Lou was shaking his head as I hung up. "That was crazy. Now we're in a worse bind."

Amen. I hadn't anticipated Big Max's "tomorrow" edict, I'd thought only to buy some-time. Still, I managed to sound optimistic. "Relax," I told Lou. "Tomorrow's another day."

Prophetic? Maybe. Whatever, the next morning—bingo—we had our solution.

It dawned when we were gassing up our crate in a shopping mall adjacent to the motel. The center embraced a number of business establishments. Supermarket, drug store, millinery shop—and a finance-and-loan company.

Lou suddenly grabbed my arm, pointing at the latter. "That place over there, Ern. Suppose we braced it for a donation?"

I goggled at him, then sobered. Damn it, it would be wild. But it could be our out. We'd been con artists, not heisters, but who was to say we couldn't switch?

My grin was tight. "You've hit it, boyo," I told Lou. "Big Max wants thirty-two grand back, that's what he'll get."

In retrospect, we were plenty naive to think we could pull it off. But that was the point—we didn't take time to think. Once committed, we settled up at the motel—we could have stiffed them but decided not—and simply went ahead.

Lou was the better driver, so during lunch hour when we figured the loan company's personnel would be reduced he maneuvered the Chevy into a slot in front where he couldn't be blocked in. We'd already muddled the plates. "Keep it perking," I told him.

A variety store had supplied a toy handgun and a canvas flight bag. I slipped the gun up my sleeve, the bag under my arm, and walked into the office. The scene was as we'd figured. Only a duo was on duty, an old grey-haired gaffer and a busty moist-lipped blonde. Beyond the counter the doors of a large floor-safe yawned.

I rested my arms on the counter and smiled as Miss America moved over. "Can I help you, sir?" she asked.

"I'd like to make a withdrawal," I said. Then I allowed the gun to slide free and vaulted the counter. "Any funny moves from either of you, I shoot," I announced.

The old gaffer choked on his teeth; the blonde gasped and knuckled her mouth. Neither recognized my weapon for what it was. I pulled the safe doors wider. "The cash! Where?"

Mutely, the girl indicated. I yanked out the drawers and quickly stuffed the banded money packets into the flight bag. "Stay put," I ordered. Then I leaped back over the counter and pelted outside. Lou revved the motor as I clambered in and rocketed away in a skillful swerve that took the paint off an oncoming station wagon.

From the Interstate, Lou sped along a network of secondary roads that girdled the city, backtracking, cutting on and off junctions. A half hour later, satisfied we'd eluded any possible pursuit, he eased up and drove back to our pad in town.

Thus the end of Operation Salvation. A quick count revealed we'd acquired thirty-one thousand. One grand short, but we could smooth that over.

That evening I phoned Murro, feigning a Houston locale. "We finally nabbed him, sir," I said. "And the money."

"Nice work," Big Max said. Then, grimly: "You work him over any?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "Plenty. You said that'd be O.K.—"

"It was," he cut in. "Are you booked back?"

"Tomorrow morning. We'll be in after lunch."

"Good," Murro grunted and hung up.

Great, eh? We lolled around the following morning and drove over to the Royal Lounge around one-thirty. The euphoria was bubbling again. Big Max would likely give us a nice bonus.

And then, as Lou toolled our jalopy into a parking spot, the whole glorious charade collapsed. Crossing the street from the opposite curb, obviously heading for the lounge, came Felix Tipton.

Lou swore and erupted from the car in a frenzied scramble. I was right at his heels. We grabbed Tipton, hustled him into the car, and barreled away with rubber screeching.

The bookkeeper flailed about on the cushions. He was a skinny balding gnome with glasses thick as jelly jars. Recognizing us, he bleated, "You've got it all wrong, fellas! I was bringing the money back!" He hefted a small leather satchel he was clutching. "Honest!" The poor guy probably thought he was going on a last ride.

"Ease up, Tipton," I told him. "We just want to talk to you."

We took him back to our pad, where he was only too eager to spell out his whole ploy. He'd taken the money on impulse, for a wild exotic fling somewhere—he was getting old, wanted some final excitement in his life—but after holing up in town at a fleabag hotel for four days, remorse (and fear?) had set in. He'd finally determined to bite the bullet, face Big Max, and hope for the best.

"You can't do that," Lou said. "Murro's clamoring for your blood."

His weak eyes blinked. "But I don't understand—"

We explained our position, what we'd done. "If you go back now," I said, "you trip us up. Besides, you're in the clear. Murro won't have anyone gunning for you. He'll get his money back and be satisfied."

Finagling Felix still couldn't credit it. He looked askance at his leather satchel. "You mean I can keep the money I took?"

Lou said, "Why not? As a matter of fact," he added pointedly, "maybe it would be a good idea if you left town right away."

It took a few more moments for the script to sink in, but when it did Tipton reacted fast. He delayed only long enough to duck into the bath-

room and freshen up. His fervent "Thanks, guys" echoed briefly and he was gone.

A half hour later we were closeted with our employer. Big Max wanted details and was pleased with the convincing sequence we fabricated. He was even more gratified when Lou handed over the flight bag. "It's a thousand short, sir," I said. "Tipton spent that much skipping about—"

As we'd anticipated, Murro shrugged off the difference. "That's O.K.," he said. "I just wanted you to catch up with that thieving little skunk. It's worth a grand to recover the rest." He broke off, shot us a bleak look. "You messed him up good, huh?"

"He won't walk for two weeks," Lou said.

Murro smiled. "Fine. Nobody gives Big Max Murro a fast shuffle."

A short knock sounded and the office door behind us opened. Murro's gaze shifted and he said, "Something, Leo?"

The intruder came forward. "I'm sorry to interrupt, sir, but here are the final loss figures on that holdup—"

My heart tightened. Lou blanched. Leo was the teeth-clacking old gaffer from the finance-and-loan company.

The tableau held for only a microsecond. Then Leo jabbed a shaking finger of recognition at me. "That's the punk who heisted us!" he exploded.

Wonderful. Lou and I were still unaware of the full range of Murro's other enterprises, legitimate or otherwise, but now we knew of at least one.

Big Max hardly moved, but the glint in those cold grey eyes indicated sudden and complete comprehension of our caper. Then his jawline bunched as he flipped an intercom switch and said, "Michaels? Renzo—"

It's nice and restful here in the hospital. And Murro himself visited us this morning. "No hard feelings, boys," he said. "Again, I gotta admire your nerve, palming off my own dough on me." His gaze hardened. "But Tipton's still loose with thirty-two more Gs of it. You want to pick up on him when you get out maybe I'll reconsider."

Lou and I think not. Since nobody gives Big Max a fast shuffle, we figure it's best to start playing with a new deck. No point in risking him discovering the whole truth. Besides, the thirty-two thousand Lou eased from Tipton's satchel when the bookkeeper briefly ducked into our bath should carry us for a while.

Fenley and Phipps track a monster in the tunnels of the New York subway . . .

THE HAWK AND THE DOME OF HELL

by
S.S.
RAFFERTY



As the living-room clock ting-tanged four A.M. throughout the humid second-floor flat, Tess Fenley lay alone in the back bedroom counting cricket chirps. She ticked off the obligatory fifteen seconds on her fingertips while counting the insects' rhythmic clicking in the yard below. Having counted forty-five chirps, she then added the magic number thirty-seven and arrived at the temperature in New-York City.

Eighty-two degrees! The penny press was calling it the worst heat wave

in late June since 1868. The memory of that terrible summer thirteen years ago when sunstroke had carried off her Aunt Nellie and hundreds of others convinced Tess that she shouldn't wear a corset today.

Her momentary mental diversion into temperature and weather was actually a ruse to keep her mind from the horrible thoughts that had kept her awake since her husband had left the house an hour before. A policeman's wife learned early on to expect midnight calls to duty, but this one was dreadfully different. Captain John Fenley wasn't fighting mere criminals this time; he was fighting the Devil himself. Tess's recall of the newspaper weather reports brought with it other headlines of the past few days, headlines that underscored her feeling of dread.

THIRD TUNNEL WORKER
DIES MYSTERIOUSLY
Police Baffled

SUBWAY DIGGING UNLEASHES
PRETERNATURAL FORCES
SAYS OCCULTIST

"SEAL WALL ST. TUNNEL"
*Clergy Fear Dome of
Hell Cracked*

CLARION CABLES
JULES VERNE
FOR ADVICE

ROGAN REFUSES TO HALT
TUNNEL WORK
Charges "El" Owners' Plot

FENLEY NABS
EMBEZZLER IN CHICAGO
Returns to City Today

As she lay in the heat, Tess knew that today's headlines would say the best detective on the Metropolitan Bureau (and hero of Bull Run) had

been assigned to the case. In all probability, she thought, he hadn't gone directly to Wall and Broadway, but had made a detour to Copley Mews on Thirteenth Street to pick up Dr. Amos Phipps, the police department consultant. Today's headlines wouldn't call the doctor by name, however, since they delighted in calling him The Hawk, a title Phipps abhorred.

The crude elevator plummeted down the dark shaft with deadfall speed, causing Fenley to question the judgment of the winchman far above on Broadway. Then suddenly, with a stomach-wrenching jolt, the carriage stopped dead in the gloom of a dimly lit tunnel.

"Orpheus descending," Phipps mused as Fenley raised the safety bar and stepped out onto the rock-dusted tramway.

"Huh?" he grunted.

"Stygian darkness, Captain—then the underworld. We go forward to our metamorphoses."

"If you please, Doctor," Fenley snapped testily, "I've had three hours' sleep in the last thirty-six. I'm in no mood for—"

"Captain Fenley!" a voice called from somewhere up the tracks.

"That you, Binabee?" Fenley's voice cannonaded off the vaulting.

"Yes, sir." The voice drew nearer. As their eyes grew accustomed to the half light and shadows from the flambeaux along the bulkhead, the figure of a man coming down the tramway took shape. He was tall and trim and wore the traditional detective's billycock hat with its iron lining. As he drew nearer, he gave a rather halfhearted salute. "Sergeant Binabee, sir, of the Broadway Squad."

"Yes, I remember you," Fenley said. "You've been on this from the start."

"Aye, Captain, and I'm sure glad to see you and the doctor on the case. It's a gold-plated baffler."

Suddenly a clamor of voices could be heard far up the tunnel. As the noise came closer, the words became clearer.

"Flanagan—" it was an angry growl "—if you mention that hissing sound to me once more, I'll fire you on the spot."

"On my mother's grave, Mr. Rogan," an Irish brogue pleaded, "I swear I heard a hiss'n' sound when I came down here on my inspection tour. 'Twas louder than a snake."

"It's either blarney or booze," a third voice said. "Either way, it only confuses the issue, Flanagan."

"That's Mr. Rogan, the owner, the tunnel boss, and the Irishman who found the body," said Binabee. "I've got my eye on him."

The three men now stood before them. Each wore a miner's cap with headlamp affixed. The shortest of the trio, a very corpulent man, wore a fine linen cloth duster which covered him like a tent from neck to boot-spats. By contrast, the other two wore scuffed leather trousers and exposed powerful biceps and forearms under rolled-up shirtsleeves.

"This is terrible, Fenley," the man in the duster said with exasperated grimness. "I told the Commissioner this afternoon that you personally should have taken up the case immediately."

"Mr. Rogan," Fenley replied, trying to hide his anger with a level tone of voice. "As he must have told you, I had just come off a difficult case in Chicago and I needed sleep."

"We understand there's been another murder." Phipps attempted to head off a squabble with the interruption. As a doctor he could tell Fenley was still close to exhaustion, and as an alienist he knew how that could alter a normally calm demeanor.

The taller of the men in work clothes, sensing the tension between the detective and the financier, said, "There has, sir. Excuse me, Major Fenley, we've met before. I'm George Lockwood. I was with you at Petersburg."

The man's friendly tone had a soothing effect on the situation. Fenley almost smiled. "Lockwood? Oh yes, Lieutenant Lockwood, Forty-eighth Pennsylvania, wasn't it? Colonel Pleasant's sappers. It's nice to see you again, Lockwood. I'm afraid I'm only a captain now."

"Yes, Captain. I'm tunnel boss on this project. Flanagan—" he turned to the other workman—"why don't you take Mr. Rogan topside for a cup of tea?" Then, to the financier: "You're going to take a chill down here, sir. I can handle things."

"I suppose you're right, George," Rogan grumped and stepped into the lift. "But make damn sure that cowboy of a winchman goes slow, you hear?"

Before the car ascended, Fenley motioned to Binabee to join the two men in the carriage: The person who finds the body bears watching. When they were behind the bar, Flanagan tugged the signal rope and they were gone.

"You'll have to forgive the old man, gentlemen," Lockwood said. "He's at his wits' end. It's understandable, of course. He's got his last cent

invested in this idea. I thought it best to get him off the premises and out of your hair."

"It appears you were also anxious to get the Flanagan fellow out of the picture," Phipps said.

Lockwood gave him a quizzical look.

"Oh, forgive me," Fenley turned to his companion. "This is Dr. Phipps, our police consultant."

"Yes, I've heard of The Hawk," Lockwood said, proffering a hand.

"It's a soubriquet I disdain," Phipps said mechanically.

"Maybe so, Doctor, but it fits. You've got a quick eye. Yes, I wanted to get Flanagan out of here. Mr. Rogan was capable of ascending alone."

"Do you suspect Flanagan?"

"Not necessarily, Doctor. I just didn't want him spouting off and accusing the Welshman again. From the confused expressions on your faces, I suspect you're not yet aware of the facts in the case."

"I've been out of the city for a week," Fenley explained, "and Dr. Phipps doesn't read the newspapers."

"And precious little information he'd get from them, although they did report that you tracked that embezzler to Chicago and were bringing him back."

"Suppose you fill in the empty spaces for us, Lockwood. What's this about a Welshman? And where's the new corpse?"

"Some four hundred yards up the Broadway cut, sir. I'll explain as we go along."

As they started down one leg of the tunnel and turned north (or so Lockwood said—Fenley and Phipps had lost all sense of direction) Lockwood explained. "As you probably know, we've been at this project for over a year and were making damn little progress, mostly because the local help is inexperienced at underground work."

He stopped and picked up a flat piece of shale-like rock. "This is schist. New York is sitting on miles of it. It makes for good building foundations, but it's hell to tunnel through because it splits easily along certain planes. Four months ago Mr. Rogan sent me out to Pennsylvania to recruit coal miners, but I could only get about forty men to come to New York. They're worth their weight in gold, these Irishmen—tough, know the ins and outs of shoring up and blasting. If you overlook their drinking and pugnaciousness, of course. But forty men weren't enough, so Mr. Rogan

sent me off to Wales and I signed up twenty-four men from the collieries over there.

"That's when the trouble started. The two groups just didn't get along and it didn't take long for bad blood to build up. Finally, I decided to split up the crews—the Welsh working nights and the Irish days, on alternating weekly shifts.

"The new system was about to start when we found the body of one of the Welshmen, Chaley Morgan, in one of the Broadway-side cut tunnels. Your people, Captain Fenley, saw it as the result of some squabble with one of the Irishmen. A day later we found Lemus Dunn's body in the Wall Street let. A revenge murder, your Sergeant Binabee figured, and I agreed with him."

"And the third death?"

"Well, Doctor, that's where it started to get muddled. Yesterday afternoon we found the body of young Carl Dietter, my assistant engineer, who was neither Irish nor Welsh and was universally liked by all the men.

"To be on the safe side, I've given the crews two days off till we get to the bottom of it. Mr. Rogan raised hell about my stopping the work, but under the circumstances I did it anyway. It's damn strange though. This latest death certainly makes a hash of the revenge motive."

"How so?"

"Didn't they tell you?" Lockwood asked, stopping and looking at both men with amazement. "This one's a woman."

"A woman!" Fenley said with a start.

"Egad," Phipps muttered to himself, "Orpheus finds his Eurydice."

"What was a woman doing down here?" Fenley demanded.

"I haven't the slightest idea, Captain. But she's down here, sure enough."

The coroner's man was known to Fenley. Dr. Brinze was a no-nonsense forensicist, completely devoid of humor or guile—which made his preliminary cause-of-death so surprising to the Captain.

"I tell you, Fenley," Brinze said, "the woman died of acute fright. There isn't a mark on her."

"Well," Fenley said, "she could have had a bad heart."

"I see what you mean, Dr. Brinze," Phipps observed. "The eyes are popped open, the jaw locked in a death scream. May I suggest, however,

that minute care be taken during the autopsy to detect any snake bites on the body."

"You believe there are snakes down here?" Brinze asked in disbelief.

"It's unlikely, but the person who found the body said he heard a hissing noise."

"Ach, that Irisher." Brinze shook his head. "But, to satisfy you, we'll look." He paused. We *always* take minute care at Bellevue, Doctor," he admonished.

"Of course. What was the cause of death in the other cases, Dr. Brinze?"

"Well, the *cause* was getting their throats torn open. It's what caused the *wounds* that has us stymied—and, I might add, what feeds this hysteria the newspapers have been churning up."

"Torn open, Doctor?"

"It's unscientific, but it's the only way to describe it. In each case, the larynx was ripped out with great force."

"An animal of some kind?"

"I will not speculate, Captain. The Coroner's Department has taken the position that the determination of the agency of death is a police matter."

"Thank you, Doctor. I'll need photographs of the woman's face for identification. Could you do the autopsy immediately—say by noon?"

"We will proceed with care, not haste, Captain," Brinze said icily. "May we move the body?"

As Brinze and the morgue wagoners disappeared down the tunnel with the stretcher Fenley turned to Phipps. "Bit of a stick, isn't he?"

"With good reason. He's a matter-of-fact scientist who has bumped into an inexplicable situation. It's frustrating for him."

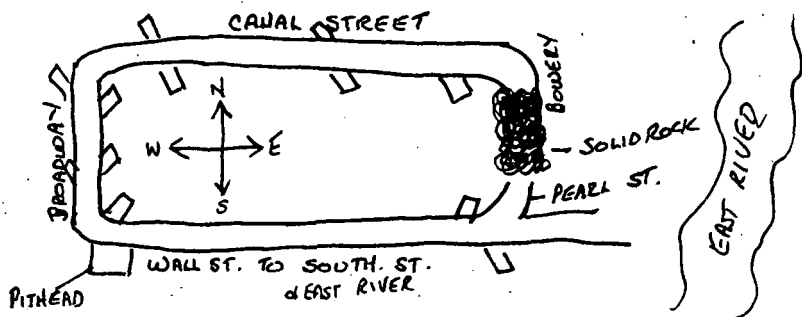
"Well, you're a scientist too. Are you frustrated?"

"Not yet, Captain. But I'm sure we're in for a bit of confusion before we're through."

Within half an hour, in spite of his fatigue, or possibly because the excitement dissipated it, Captain Fenley had marshalled his forces and his wits. Twenty uniformed men of the crack Broadway Squad, split into two groups each headed by a sergeant, stood in casual ranks listening to his orders. Several of the younger men could be observed casting sus-

picious eyes at the tunnel's overhead as if expecting it to crash down at any moment. Fenley was saying:

"Now, each sergeant has a map. We're standing under the corner of Wall Street and Broadway. One party will proceed north on Broadway until you reach the curve at Canal Street and then follow it east to the Bowery. The other party will go east across Wall to Pearl Street and then north. The completed tunnel will be like a big circle, only the section above Pearl isn't connected yet, so you won't meet.



"Keep your eyes skinned and listen to your sergeants. I want every inch of it covered, including the side tunnels you'll find along the way. That's where the entrances up to the street will eventually go. Carry on."

As the two groups took their assigned routes, Phipps came down the tunnel from his reexamination of the side cut in which the woman's body had been found. "Are you looking for anything special, Captain?" he asked.

"Anything I can get. I'd like to prove this woman was a jade working her trade down here."

"A prostitute in the tunnel?"

"Doctor, one of the main things I learned in the army was that the only two things that can't be kept out of an encampment are prostitution and dysentery. These miners are hard-working men with lusty appetites. At least it gives us a reason for her being down here."

Phipps was shaking his head in disbelief. "You *do* need sleep, my friend. The dead woman's clothes were of good quality—her hands were well cared for and meticulously manicured."

"A gentlewoman?"

"No, a working girl. In fact, a telegrapher." He observed Fenley wryly. "I can see I've jarred you a bit. Her hands, Captain, were so well taken care of that my attention was drawn to them. But despite all the cosmetic care, she couldn't hide the callusing of her right index finger. I suspect she might have suffered from what is known as Morse Finger, a spasmodic contraction of the digit that works the telegraph key."

"Well, I'll be damned," Fenley groaned. Then: "You'd think Brinze would have caught onto that."

"He undoubtedly will. However, you now have a line of inquiry as far as occupation goes."

"And we can start right here in the financial district, where hundreds of telegraphers are employed." The police officer rubbed his hands with satisfaction. It was a factual crumb in a case that appeared to be thoroughly devoid of solid evidence.

"I think we should talk to this Flanagan fellow right away."

"I had the same idea. He's being brought back down. I didn't like the way Lockwood hustled him out of here."

"I'm more interested in what he heard."

Sergeant Binabee was with the Irish miner when the shaft descended. Fenley took him aside and whispered a series of instructions while Phipps interrogated Flanagan.

"Sean Flanagan, sir," the man answered Phipp's initial question. "I came over as a babe in arms and consider myself an American despite the brogue."

"As well you are. I understand, Sean, that you heard something when you found the woman. Tell me about it."

"Well, sir, I pulled the night-watch trick since the two-day layoff

started. I was to tour the tunnel every morning checkin' for water seepage, cracks, things like that. Well, I started up the Broadway leg checkin' the bulkheads when I found her. It was then I heard it."

"Hissing?"

"Yes, but not exactly. It was a deeper sound, more like steam escapin' in spurts."

"Could you determine where the sound came from, Sean?"

"Sound is as tricky a thing in a tunnel as it is in a mine, sir. It echoes off the bulkheads—it's hard to tell exactly where it's comin' from."

"We were thinking along the lines of a snake?"

The idea provoked laughter from the miner. "If it was a snake, sir, it had to be the biggest reptile on all the face of the earth."

"Who found the other bodies, Sean?"

"Chaley Morgan was found by a couple of fellas. Lemus Dunn was found by his brother, Danny. And the boss found the Dietter kid."

"Mr. Rogan?"

"No, Lockwood. He's the real boss of this job. Knows his business too."

While Flanagan talked, Fenley, having dispatched Binabee, joined them.

"How did you get along with the Welshmen, Sean?" Phipps asked.

"Me personal? I can take some and leave others."

"How did Lemus Dunn feel about them?"

"Well, he was a greenhorn and a bit thick. In general, most of the lads from the old country didn't get along with the Taffies, but both sides was greenhorns to fellas like myself—Americans, that is. Dr. Phipps, I have a hunch these questions are leading to this talk of hatred and revenge killings between the men. It's pure slag. If a miner—any miner, Taffy or Mick—has a beef, he settles it with this." He held up a hamlike fist. "Not by sneakin' up on a man and mauling him like an animal."

"Thanks for your insights, Sean," Phipps said. He paused. "I'd like you to do me a favor."

"To be sure, sir."

"I'd like you to visit Mr. Barnum's menagerie—"

The miner looked shocked at the suggestion. "That's mighty tony society for the likes of me, Doctor."

"The Captain's men will make sure you're given every consideration. What I would like you to do is walk through the menagerie with your eyes closed. Take your time and listen to the sounds of the various beasts."

If you hear any sound resembling the hissing you heard when you found the woman, tell the detective accompanying you. But don't open your eyes. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then Captain Fenley will arrange it. Right, Captain?"

Fenley replied affirmatively and detailed another plainclothesman to accompany Flanagan in the Barnum experiment. Phipps heaved a sigh. "What's your next move, Captain?"

"Well, I think we should get a few solid facts under our belts. Let's get Rogan's thoughts while Binabee's boys are covering the woman's identification. Hey, there, Lockwood," he said to the tunnel boss, who had been leaning casually on an empty tram cart, "where would Mr. Rogan be at this time of day?"

"Going on ten— Only one place. The Stock Exchange."

"Give my sergeant the addresses of the miners. We'll have to talk to them all."

"Sure thing. But most of them will be using the days off to make extra money on other construction jobs."

"Tunnels?"

"No, Captain—" the ex-sapper smiled "—we're the only tunnel in town. But there are lots of job sites looking for experienced men who speak English and understand rigging. There are several new buildings going up right here on Wall Street."

"By the way, Lockwood, don't you have a guard or watchman at the pithead?"

"In a manner of speaking, but they're usually either asleep or sneaking off to some gin mill. If you're asking if it's difficult to sneak down here, it isn't."

Five minutes later Fenley and Phipps emerged at the pithead into the bright hot sunshine of Wall and Broadway. Fenley started off toward the East River and had gone a few yards before he realized he was alone. Turning, he found his companion standing precariously on one leg, shaking pebbles from his shoe.

"Serves you right, wearing those fancy European slippers in a tunnel, Doctor."

"Pumps," Phipps corrected him as he put the shoe back on his foot

and walked on. "And much more comfortable than those heavy boots of yours."

Fenley shrugged, but in his soul he knew the shoes were a sort of symbol of their divergent approaches to crime—he relying on dogged legwork, Phipps leaning toward tailored intellectualism. He enjoyed Phipps's company, of course. And the man was a damned good cook, although Fenley would never tell his wife about their bachelor braiser dinners. He had a fine mind too, but at times he went too far. This Orpheus stuff, for instance, and all this la-di-da about metamorphoses and Eurydice. Phipps always played it too fancy—his shoes, his food, his methods of detection.

As they walked along the north side of Wall Street, Fenley noticed excavation work ahead where the new Sub-Treasury Building would rise next to the U.S. Assay Office. "We'd better cross to the south side, Doctor. I see more pebbles in your future. The way they're building up the area down here, I can see where Rogan's subway *could* make a fortune."

Behind them, at the Broadway foot of this canyon of commerce, the bell-tower of Trinity Church began to toll ten o'clock. Each stroke seemed to accentuate the mounting human energy all across the eight-block strip to the swift East River. Here were the great life insurance companies, the U.S. Customs House, the Cotton Exchange, the Assay Office, Wells and Standard Oil, the Petroleum Exchange, all housed in magnificently solid buildings, each new one outmatching its neighbors in one superlative or other—largest, tallest, widest, most opulent. Architectural records fell with each new ground-breaking.

Between New and Broad Streets, at 13 Wall, a high block-long marble building, an elderly concierge opened its brassbound oak doors and waited patiently, his pocket watch in one hand and a clapper bell in the other. As the tower sent out the tenth toll over its sleepy graveyard, the concierge violently clanged his handbell. "The market is open!" he shouted to the milling crowd much as a railway conductor would hail "All aboard!"

The New York Stock Exchange, the drive piston of the country's—the world's—commerce, now chugged into action that would see thirty million dollars change hands before 3:00 P.M. Within its great hall, 1,200 silk-hatted men would shout bids above the tumult and make lightning-fast mental calculations toward their next moves in the wild game that had a language all its own.

As Fenley and Phipps turned into the building and headed across the marble hall toward the door to the trading floor, they found their way blocked by the concierge. "Have to use the visitors' gallery, gents," he said, pointing to a stairway. When Fenley showed his shield and stated his business, the small man said with a triumphant smile, "Still don't cut no ice, but I can tell Mr. Rogan you're here, Captain."

Moments later, Rogan came hurrying off the trading floor. In broad daylight and dressed in striped trousers and morning coat, he cut a more imposing figure than he had in the tunnel. His irritability hadn't changed, however; it had, in fact, increased.

"Twenty points," he muttered. "The market opened only minutes ago, and I'm down twenty points already. I lost twelve yesterday and never bounced back."

When Fenley asked who his business enemies might be, a sardonic smile crossed Rogan's pudgy face. "Any one of 1,199 men," he said in a low tone. "Any seat holder on this Exchange. Don't be fooled by these tailored clothes and clean fingernails, fellows. I've done my time with a pick and shovel. You see, it's called the Exchange, but it's really an exclusive gentlemen's club, and they don't see me as a gentleman. And maybe I'm not. Hell, I never claimed to be. I've dug mines, peddled coal oil, run carnies and cooch shows, and never saw the inside of a schoolroom, never mind a college. They all got their noses out of joint when I finally wangled a seat. Cost me forty thousand dollars, but I got it and I aim to keep it. I got the jump on 'em too, with this underground scheme. *That* burned 'em good and proper."

"Could you narrow it down a bit, Mr. Rogan—1,199 suspects is a big chunk."

"You can start and stop with Gervase Brumm of Elevated Transit, for my money. My underground system will put the kibosh on his noisy, stinking cattlecars, so he has plenty to lose. If he had his way the sun would never shine again on New York streets, with all these ugly girders and tracks overhead.

"And don't think those fine gentlemen are above murder. You don't know what goes on behind Wall Street doors, my lads. Don't forget the Gould and Fisk shenanigans back in Sixty-nine. Brumm is no better. And he hates me. He even blackballed me at the Yacht Club for spite. *Me*, turned down by a bunch of Sunday sailors! *Me*, who's been a ship's master

in my time! Hell, I own a seagoing schooner, not a toy boat like the rest of them."

"He's a bit of a buccaneer, isn't he?" Phipps observed when they were back on the street.

"Tough-minded, certainly. You have to admire a fellow who pulls himself up by his bootstraps. You know, these murders may stop work on the tunnel, but somehow I don't think anything will stop Rogan. He's liable to dig the damn thing himself just to prove his point.

"Well, I don't relish bothering Gervase Brumm—he's a high muckety-muck around town and will resent an interview—but we have to look at all sides and the business-revenge idea can't be ignored."

They started eastward again toward the Elevated Transit Line offices at the East River foot of Wall Street. As they strolled along, an occasional and welcome breeze came up from the water. Fenley reviewed the case aloud. "We've more angles than a miter box in this thing," he said. "Let's say the first two deaths were tradeoffs between the Irish and Welsh miners and somehow the well liked assistant engineer took sides and was killed. That would neaten it up if it weren't for the lady telegrapher. She's the fly in the ointment."

"She might well be the answer to the whole matter," Phipps muttered.

"Yes. Once we get Brumm out of the way we can concentrate on her. I sure wish my prostitute theory held up though."

"There's another aspect to this that bears investigation."

"Which is?"

"The Molly Maguires."

"The Pennsylvania miners' secret society?" Fenley asked.

"More a clan of killers who terrorized mine owners a few years back."

"But neither Rogan nor Lockwood mentioned any labor problems. The Welsh and the Irish hate each other, not the company."

"I was thinking that a few Maguires salted among the crew by an outside party would be insurance that the subway would fail."

"Which brings us back to Gervase Brumm—at whose door we've just arrived," Fenley announced.

"Rogan sounds a mite like 'rogue' to me, gentlemen," Gervase Brumm said from behind a desk that seemed to take up half his large office. He was bald and sported old-fashioned muttonchop whiskers. "And rogue he

is. Of course, I understand, Captain Fenley, that you have to follow up on all sorts of information, even if it is lies. So let me tell you about Rogue Rogan. Along with being a bit of a pirate—and I mean real South Sea piracy—he's also the biggest damn fool this side of the equator.

"Take this subway scheme, for example. When my syndicate decided to develop a transit system, we considered tunneling, but the engineers turned it down as impractical. If you were going to go underground, the best method would be to dig open trenches, lay the trackage, roof over the cut, and backfill. But even that's impractical, so we went with the elevated concept. Mark my words, men, Rogan is out to swindle—and swindle he will, unless you can catch onto him."

"We understand, sir," Fenley said, "that if the project fails, he will lose everything. So why would he cut his own throat by failing deliberately?"

"That I can't say. But if he does fail, I hope his scurvy boat goes up for sale. I'll buy it and sink it." He got to his feet and pointed out the window to the river twelve stories below. Fenley and Phipps raised themselves out of their chairs to follow his finger's path. "See that God-awful scow?" Brumm pointed to a dilapidated schooner docked at the foot of Wall Street. "He berths her there just to annoy me. I even tried to buy the dock, and found he owns it."

"Mr. Brumm, I noticed on the lobby directory that Elevated Transit Lines is just one of your holdings," Phipps said:

"Oh, my syndicate is quite diversified, Doctor."

"Yes, and it's quite impressive. Rails, coal, commodities—is that coal mining or coal shipping?"

"Both," Brumm said with a gusty laugh. "No use owning a railroad unless you own a few coal mines, you know. Well, gentlemen, I hope I've allayed any fears that I am the author of Rogan's difficulties." He laughed again. "Elephants don't strike at gnats."

As they rose to go Fenley said, "I know you're a churchgoing man, Mr. Brumm. What do you think of this Dome of Hell idea?"

"Well, sir, I can't say yes and I can't say no, but if there's a God in heaven there's got to be a Devil, and why not in a rogue's tunnel?"

They were headed back to Broadway when Phipps said, "Sergeant Binabee has a list of the tunnel workers by now. I suggest you look it over and wire the Altoona police. I noticed on the directory as we left that Brumm's coal mines are based there. You'll want to know if any of

the tunnel workers ever worked for Brumm. And that includes Lockwood, the tunnel boss."

"Well, now, I *know* Lockwood. He's a fine officer."

"Spare me, Captain. Battlefield acquaintances give a one-sided perspective. I'm really most interested in why the one expert engineer was sent away from the job to recruit workers when anyone could have done it."

"That's not necessarily true. It's dangerous work down there, and he'd want a hand-picked crew. I would. But I'll check it anyway. And when we get the lady telegrapher's picture, we'll make the Brumm offices our first stop. But you know, Doctor, old Brumm really hasn't any money motive. He's got more than a body could count."

"I often think that one of the inherent dangers of having great wealth is that it allows time for the full development of our baser instincts—in this case, jealousy or hate. Poor people are so involved in their own survival that—Fenley, isn't that one of the Broadway Squad hurtling toward us?"

A young uniformed officer was running so fast he almost streaked by them. Fenley's large hands halted him. "If you're going to run, young fellow, get out in the street with the horses," he said.

"Oh, Captain Fenley, I was on my way to the Elevated Transit offices for you! Sergeant Binabee tracked you down through Mr. Rogan. You'd better come back to the tunnel right away, sir."

"What's the problem, lad?"

"They found the footprints of a monster down there, sir!"

STRANGE PAW PRINT FOUND
IN TUNNEL ROCK DUST
BY BROADWAY SQUAD

PREHISTORIC ANIMAL, SAY
UNIVERSITY EXPERTS
OF FRESH PRINT

ANCIENT BEASTS ROAM
CENTER OF EARTH
Come Up Through Tunnel

MAYOR ORDERS TUNNEL
CLOSED IN MOVE TO
QUIET PUBLIC HYSTERIA
*Seeks Federal Troops to
Patrol City Streets*

NOT FLESH EATERS;
SAYS PROF
*But Tunnel Deaths
Belie His Theory*

"The madness and delusion of the crowd," Phipps said, shaking his head at the latest fiction from the presses along Park Row. He and Fenley had established temporary headquarters at Precinct One, a short walk from Wall Street. He placed the latest headline on Fenley's desk.

FENLEY THEORY THAT
PRINT IS A FAKE
CALLED PREPOSTEROUS
*Experts Sneer
Tunnel Searched in Vain*

Fenley scowled and tossed the paper aside with disgust. "Damned experts," he muttered. "I'll show 'em yet. We've drawn some good leads in your absence, Doctor. What have you been up to?"

"Nothing much. I was over at the Met. I had lunch with Max Alvary." Fenley looked blank.

"Alvary, the opera star. He opened in *Siegfried* in the Fall. They've been losing money on Italian operas, so they're mounting a German season. Do you like Wagner, Captain?"

Fenley spluttered and said the only Wagner he knew was serving thirty years for bank robbery.

"You said some leads have developed?" Phipps asked.

Fenley nodded. "It seems Lockwood once worked for Brumm's company in the Altoona area, but the Irish miners worked in other mines. But here's an interesting angle. Sean Flanagan was long suspected of Molly Maguire activity, but the Altoona force and the mine-company police could never prove anything against him."

"Excellent," Phipps said without excitement. "Anything else?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact—"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. "She's here," Binabee said, poking his head in.

"Let's have her," Fenley ordered.

The young woman was obviously nervous as she was ushered into the room and offered a chair.

"We appreciate your cooperation, Miss—"

"Cooper, sir. Mary Cooper. I doubt I can really be of much help, beyond telling you that the girl in the picture this gentleman showed me is Clara Tuttle. We lived in the same boarding house and were telegraphers at Western Union's Pine Street office. And that's about all I can tell you, gentlemen."

"Up-until now, young lady," Fenley said sternly, "you haven't told us a blessed thing. The information you've just confirmed was given us by the manager of your Pine Street branch. Why didn't you come forward when the girl failed to come home two nights ago?"

Mary Cooper's mouth quivered slightly and she shifted her gaze to Phipps in a silent appeal for help.

"I think, Captain, we can assume that Miss Cooper seriously believed Miss Tuttle had been called out of town. Or—" Phipps addressed the young woman "—was there another good reason for her absence?"

"There was," she said excitedly. "There most certainly was!" She turned her attention back to Fenley with reassurance. "I thought she had moved up her elopement by a week."

"I see," Fenley said, suppressing a grin at Phipps. They often played friend-and-foe with people under investigation. And Fenley always ended up being the bad hat. "Go on, Miss Cooper—who was she eloping with?"

"I don't know." Anticipating renewed antagonism from Fenley, she hastened to be emphatically sincere. "I swear I don't know her gentleman's name, sir. She was very secretive about it, so I didn't pry. All I know is that she was to elope with a professional man over the Fourth of July weekend. The Fourth falls on Monday, so they would have had the long weekend."

"Professional man?" Fenley's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Did she mention what profession, Miss Cooper?"

"No, she never did."

"Never? Come, Miss Cooper, you were roommates—friends. It's hard to believe you two didn't share intimacies."

"We weren't really friends, sir. Miss Brooke, the landlady, just put her in with me in a take-it-or-leave-it fashion. Clara was a closemouthed type, except for the one evening she told me about her elopement. I thought she was just trying to get a rise out of me at first, but then I saw she was serious. She said that after July third she'd never have to touch a telegraph key again because she was marrying a professional man who worked on Wall Street. She asked me not to say anything when she didn't show up for work after the holiday."

"My, my, that is secretive. Didn't she realize inquiries would eventually be made as to her whereabouts?"

"You're echoing my very words to her, sir. She said they'd need only seventy-two hours and then the world could know, for all she cared. I assumed his family was well off and would have opposed the match. She was an orphan, she said."

The rest of the interrogation, despite Phipps's kid-glove questioning, produced no further information and Mary Cooper was released. While she had been at the Old Slip precinct house Binabee's men had thoroughly searched the room she had shared with Clara Tuttle and questioned all the other roomers. There wasn't a trace of evidence to link the dead woman with any man, professional or otherwise.

Both men spent the remainder of the afternoon reviewing the case, trying to fit Clara Tuttle into the jumble of characters involved.

"Damned if I can make any sense of it," Fenley said. "Maybe she has no connection with the tunnel. Could be some Johnny who didn't want to get married took advantage of the mysterious doings down there to get rid of her and cover his motive."

"So he took her down there and scared her to death, saying 'Boo' in the dark?" Phipps chided. "I'm afraid not, my friend. She is definitely a part of the whole Dome mystery, and I still think she's the most valuable piece on the board. Is the tunnel sealed off as yet?"

"No, but if the Mayor has his way that shaft will soon be filled with twenty tons of cement."

"Rogan fights to the end, eh? Well, good for him. Once it's sealed, the case becomes unsolvable."

"It's not Rogan who's doing the fighting. In fact, he's about done in financially. The main pressure is coming from old P. T. Barnum. He

wants to trap one of the monsters for his circus. It's just another of his publicity stunts, of course, but he has the governor's ear. Eventually we'll have every crackpot in creation showing up with one scheme or other. Just before you came back from your operatic luncheon, there was a fellow in here from out west named Cody who wanted a permit to hunt down there. He calls himself Buffalo Bill, no less.

He sighed. "Well, I'm for having all the miners in for questioning. Maybe we can shake something loose. It looks like another all night to-do, Doctor."

"I wish you good fortune, Captain."

"Oh, you're not going to be here *again*? Another opera?"

"No, I'm going to a lecture at Columbia and then have a late supper with friends from Holland. By the way, would anyone require a permit to hunt down there?"

"I'd sure hate to be the fool who signed one."

"You may well be yet, Captain. By the by, when you're questioning the workers, would you kindly ask them if they are ever troubled by foot blisters?"

"Sure, Doctor," was the wary reply. "Right foot or left?"

"Either," Phipps said seriously, and departed.

The next afternoon the headlines reflected the final defeat of Charles Rogan, financier.

ROGAN TO SEAL TUNNEL HIMSELF

Apologizes to Public

for Panicking City

Action Lauded by Mayor

Cement Pours Tomorrow

The group of men who crowded into the Mayor's office shortly after the headlines appeared was led by Dr. Amos Phipps.

"Well, I won't sign it," the Mayor insisted. "It's damned dangerous."

Motley was an apt description for the group—they were as diverse in background as they were in appearance. There was the corpulent and ebullient Phineas T. Barnum, wearing a well tailored suit and vest. A tall man in his early thirties—William Cody—wore the broad-brimmed slouch hat of the plainsman. Phipps and Fenley, of course, displayed their usual

distinctive tastes in haberdashery, one European cut, the other off-the-rack rumpled. Possibly the most discordant note in the group was Sean Flanagan, still in leather pants, flannel shirt, and boots.

Phipps pressed the issue with the Mayor. "It's more dangerous if you don't sign it, Your Honor. If there are risks these men are willing to take them."

It was Barnum's threat to bring in the Governor—and the President, if necessary—that finally got the permit signed.

Later that evening the five men approached the tunnel pithead, showed the permit to the Federal officer, and entered the elevator car.

"I think, Mr. Barnum," Phipps said, "it would be better if you remained on top. I don't know what we're going to bump into down there." The offer was made in deference to Barnum's age, which was close on seventy.

"That's why we have these repeater rifles, isn't it, young fellow?" Barnum asked with bravado. "I wouldn't miss it for the world—not that I have the slightest idea of what we're doing, or why."

"That makes four of us," Fenley grouched. "Only Dr. Phipps seems to know."

When they reached the bottom, they found that many of the torches along the tunnel wall had gone out through neglect. The few that remained lit here and there created a confusion of flicker and shadow—an eerie chiaroscuro.

"I can go back up and get some kerosene for the torches," Flanagan offered.

"No, we have enough light for our purpose," Phipps murmured.

"What next?" Fenley asked. "The squad has been over these tunnels with a fine-toothed comb. Shall we split up—half of us take the Broadway leg and the other half the Wall Street leg?"

"No, Captain, we're interested only in the Wall Street end. Try to move quietly now."

They started off, Phipps and Cody leading, and were a few yards under Wall Street when they heard it.

"Jay-sus," Flanagan whispered, "the hissing again!"

Down the tunnel there was indeed a hissing sound—not unlike a steam engine, but somehow less rhythmic, less mechanical. It had the naturalness of breathing. Suddenly Cody was at the alert, his rifle at the ready.

Phipps had seen it too, as the thing—a tail, possibly—slithered into a side cut.

“What in tarnation—” Cody started to say. A head darted out for only a split second, but long enough to burn it into a man’s memory for a lifetime. It was the head of a gargoylike creature covered with brown scales. When it opened its bright red mouth it showed vicious sawlike teeth.

Each man was riveted in his place by a curious force that blended stark terror and awed disbelief into one moment of inaction.

“Watch it!” Fenley shouted as the head now grew a body at least ten feet long from its ugly head to its slithery tail. It looked to weigh as much as three hundred pounds yet it moved with lightning speed.

Cody started the fusillade of fire that tore into the breast flesh, sending spurts of blood onto the shale-dust floor. Each man had emptied his rifle in seconds, and the thing now lay dead just six feet from them.

“Reload, men!” Fenley gave the command in his old military style. “There may be more of them.”

“God help us,” Flanagan said, making the sign of the cross.

“I think not, Captain,” Phipps assured him.

Barnum had taken a torch from its fixture and was examining the beast. “It’s a shame it had to be killed,” he lamented. “Gentlemen, this would have been the attraction to end all attractions. Bigger than the Wild Man of Borneo and the Siamese twins rolled into one. But what in blue blazes is it? It looks like a lizard.”

“Precisely, Mr. Barnum,” Phipps explained. “A giant lizard called the monitor, or Komodo dragon. If you had an *authentic* Wild Man of Borneo he’d know of it, since this beast is found on the nearby island of Java.”

“Well, I’ll be dundered. I’ve got to get me one. Are they man eaters?”

“According to the Dutch zoologist I dined with last night, they have been known to eat a wild pig or a small deer at times. I felt it best to take no chances on when this beast had last eaten.”

“So *this* is what frightened Clara Tuttle to death,” Fenley observed. “But how about the dead men?”

“Ah, that’s a different kind of monster,” Phipps said. “Let’s get to work, Flanagan.”

Skirting the beast’s body, they followed Phipps further up the Wall Street tunnel until they came to a large gatelike structure that blocked their way. Closer examination showed it was made of wood and it was

easily unhinged from the bulkhead. While Flanagan and Cody took it down, Phipps explained that the temporary gate was to keep the lizard in the far end of the tunnel. Once the gate was removed, Phipps was on his way again, and for the first time Fenley noticed that he was pacing off the distance. Then suddenly he stopped, turned to the north wall, and said to Flanagan, "It's here someplace, Sean. Let your seasoned eye do its work."

The Irishman held a torch close to the wall and examined it with infinite care. Then he stopped, ran his fingers over something, turned, and smiled. "This must be it. The seaming ain't natural," he said. He tugged at a piece of sharp shale and a door suddenly swung open, revealing another tunnel. This led back to a small crude lift, big enough to hold two men. Far above there was a clanking sound.

Fenley started to speak, but was shushed by Phipps, who beckoned them back to the main tunnel.

"Close it up, Flanagan. We'll wait for him here."

"May I ask who we're waiting for?"

"Why, Captain, I thought you knew, since you supplied the vital insight into the case." Phipps didn't finish for just then the tunnel wall reopened and an amazed Charles Rogan, dressed in miner's gear, walked into The Hawk's trap.

"Good evening, Mr. Rogan," Phipps said gaily. "Putting the finishing touches on the shaft yourself, I see. Too bad we had to interrupt before the Fourth of July. Now shall we walk down the rest of the tunnel to where you secretly ascend to your dock on the East River?"

"You've got nothing on me, Phipps," Rogan glowered. "I've done nothing illegal."

"Triple murder? Attempted robbery? Come, man, you're through, and you know it."

"Robbery? What robbery, Doctor?" Fenley asked.

"The robbery that was the purpose of this elaborate subway system. You see, gentlemen, we are standing under thirty million dollars in gold."

"There's no gold to be mined in New York," Barnum interjected.

"Oh, yes there is, sir," Phipps corrected. "Directly above us is the U.S. Assay Office, into which Mr. Rogan here had a shaft dug by Chaley Morgan and Lemus Dunn under the direction of Carl Dietter, the assistant engineer. Clever of you to use an Irish and a Welsh miner, supposed enemies, for the heavy work, Mr. Rogan. When they outlived their

usefulness they were killed as part of the plot to get the tunnel shut down. Tearing their throats out was crude but effective.”

“You can’t prove a thing, Phipps,” Rogan said confidently. “As far as I’m concerned there *was* a plot to rob the Assay. I uncovered this secret shaft tonight.”

“And the Komodo dragon? Did it come up from the bowels of hell? How did you get past it? Come, Rogan, you’re caught red-handed. The beast is yours, trapped by your schooner crew on Java and kept aboard the ship until it was needed in the final days of the plot. After you had used the tunneling skills of Morgan, Dunn, and Dietter, you killed them and put the finishing touches on the secret shaft yourself, using the dragon to scare off anyone who might venture down here while you worked and leading it back to the ship when the night’s work was over.

“Now you would be correct in saying that all I’ve said is universally applicable and circumstantial, except for your one crucial mistake. You forgot that people fall in love and confide in each other. Carl Dietter was affianced to Clara Tuttle, the foolish girl who ventured down here seeking an answer to her lover’s death and met deadly terror instead. You were as amazed as anyone else when her body was found, although you must have suspected she had seen the dragon. But it offered no problem, you thought, because it further compounded the mystery. That, Rogan, was your downfall. Dietter had told his future wife all about your plans for the Fourth of July, and she in turn told a friend, a Miss Mary Cooper.

“There were, of course, other clues that pointed to you. When Lockwood pushed for a night shift, you had to act because you needed an empty tunnel to complete the Assay Office shaft. Thus Morgan was killed ahead of schedule, probably with the help of Dunn and Dietter. Then, you were always sending Lockwood away on recruitment.”

Phipps stopped. The smirk on Rogan’s face had turned to a dark scowl so fierce it distracted everyone’s attention long enough to give Rogan time to produce a derringer from inside his shirt—but not quickly enough to stop Cody’s reaction shot that sent Rogan’s body into a heap in the rock dust.

After the Broadway Squad had rounded up the five-man crew of Rogan’s schooner and Flanagan had found the secret East River shaft, Barnum insisted on buying dinner at Rector’s, where the group looked more motley than ever among the society diners.

"So you were working when I thought you were playing," Fenley said to Phipps, who was forking an oyster.

"Even when I went to the Met," he replied. "You see, in the second act of *Siegfried* the hero slays Fafner, the dragon. It's quite a dramatic moment. It's possible that's where Rogan got the idea in the first place. Anyway, through Alvary, the star of the opera, I talked with the creators of the stage dragon. In their opinion, the print wasn't man-made. Well, if it wasn't faked, and it couldn't possibly be a prehistoric beast, then it had to be something alive.

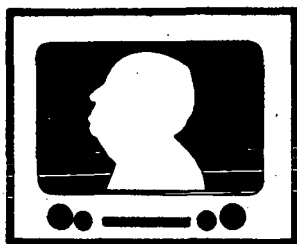
"Zoology provided the answer through the Dutch scientist who had worked on Java. The South Seas aspect put Rogan into focus. The question was why he would wreck his own subway plan. Brumm told us about engineering difficulties in deep tunneling, so I conjectured that the project was meant to fail from the beginning. But what would he want with an abandoned tunnel under Wall Street? Then I remembered my foot blisters, and it became clear."

"You did ask me to find out if the miners ever got blisters," Fenley said, "but I thought you were pulling my leg."

"Not at all. I said you gave me the vital insight, and you did. You recall I got some pebbles in my shoe while in the tunnel? Then, when we were passing the Sub-Treasury Building construction site you cautioned me to avoid picking up any more of them. That started a sequence of inquiry. Geologists at the Columbia School of Mines agreed that the pebbles found in the shale tunnel actually came from sub-surface soil—about twenty feet down—in the Wall Street area. They could have gotten there only if someone was digging a shaft to the surface. Deserted tunnel, the Assay Office loaded with gold, a three-day national holiday, a convenient schooner at tide's turning. It was simple once the plot was 'unearthed.'"

Pebbles, Fenley thought as he toyed with his food. Blisters. Phipps had been dangling the clue so his associate could share in the solution. And he would have, if Phipps weren't so damn fancy.





CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

Despite the wholesomeness which is the traditional characteristic of the output of Walt Disney Studios, the Disney films show a melodramatic streak worth our attention. From the very first appearance of the charmer who was to capture the hearts of the world, Mickey Mouse in *Steamboat Willie*—the animated short debuted in 1928—simple, enduring goodness was of course only to be opposed by equally dedicated figures of evil, and the Disney gallery of villains sometimes proved just as interesting and indestructible as the studio's heroes.

As Mickey Mouse evolved and drew about him a circle of friends, which included girl friend Minnie and faithful dog Pluto, an enemy lurked in the background as well: the dastardly Pegleg Pete, a huge catlike creature towering over the mouse and menacing him from the very first cartoon. In later years he was to lose his wooden stump and change his name to Black Pete, but his villainy was undiminished—always locking with Mickey over some lurid caper, from stolen bank loot to hidden treasure. (While Pete personified wickedness most often in the Mouse saga, there were of course other bad guys: nasty rodents like Mr. Slicker and Ruffhouse Rat, the slimy Sylvester Shyster, the scarred boxer Creamo Catnera, and many others.) In a decade Mickey's impact was worldwide, and the screen-born success was up to his mouse ears in mystery in films, books, and newspaper strips.

Pegleg Pete, a revolver dangling alongside his stump, is the brawn behind a scheme to cheat Minnie Mouse out of her inheritance, her late Uncle Mortimer's ranch, in *Mickey in Death Valley*, the Mouse's first full

mystery continuity, while lawyer Shyster, the very image of Depression Era legal duplicity, is the brains. The adventures are fast, furious, and inventive: to frighten Minnie into signing the deed over to him, Sylvester traps her in a mine where she sees Mickey apparently hanging by his neck. It's only the shadow of a dummy, but still stuff strong enough not to disgrace even an adult pulp. For good measure, a hidden-identity character called "The Fox" also moves through the story. Other celebrated adventures during this rich melodrama period (the middle and late '30s) included Mickey's tangles with the seven ghosts haunting Colonel Basset's mansion and driving the old fellow mad; he hires Mickey the private investigator—with a book titled *How To Detect* prominent on his desk—to rid the place of them. Naturally, the ghosts are not ghosts at all but smugglers, but until Mickey rounds them up—and quite cleverly too—we are in for some solid surprises.

The most legendary of all Mickey's mystery opponents was a figure all in black known as "The Phantom Blot." Mickey had by 1939 already been well established as a criminologist; Police Chief O'Hara frantically telephones him for help: "We've got a mystery that's baffled the whole force. How'd you like to try your hand at helping us?" The Blot, who only steals cameras, sends macabre messages to the police chief: *Put your men on some other case where they have a chance to live! Be humane!* Indeed, the bondage and torture to which the Blot subjects Mickey when the little investigator twice falls into his hands would cause alarm today, but Mickey escapes and—true sleuth—unearths the Blot's plot.

In 1937 Walt Disney embarked on a major undertaking, the first feature-length animated film. With *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* he brought a beloved fairy tale to the screen with all its dark Gothic elements intact. The wicked queen, who wishes Snow White's heart brought to her in a jeweled box, who can transform herself into a hideous witch, who glides through dungeons and torture chambers to stir together poison potions, is one of the screen's premier images of dread. (Disney was to recreate her in a variety of forms, from the evil witch Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* to the dognapping Cruella de Ville of *101 Dalmatians*.) The grotesque was a strong undercurrent in all of his animated features from the first, as Snow White runs terrified through the haunted forest of the night.

Pinocchio was an instructional tract on the effects of evil companionship, and the decadent lure of Pleasure Island with its lurking slavers has

realistic parallels as well. *Fantasia* contains the magical sequence about the sorcerer and his apprentice, and the ghostly worshippers to the god of evil during the "Night on Bald Mountain." (Bela Lugosi consented to model when Disney artists sketched the towering figure of Satan above the mountain.) In *Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, the part taken from *The Wind and the Willows* has Toady break out of jail to rescue his beloved Toad Hall from robbers (Basil Rathbone narrates the story), while in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* schoolteacher Ichabod flees through another of Disney's frightening forests, pursued by a "headless" horseman. The studio's adaptation of Barrie's *Peter Pan* presented audiences with another classic villain: Captain Hook.

In 1950 Disney began a series of live-action features in England, to use up "frozen" pounds which could only be spent in that country. *Treasure Island* was an epic retelling of the Stevenson yarn, with Robert Newton expertly cast as one of literature's great scoundrels, Long John Silver, leader of the mutineers. After several British historical romances (*Rob Roy*, *Robin Hood*), Disney produced in America one of the great melodrama films of all time, the 1954 release of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. A work of art, this spellbinding drama featured James Mason as the mysterious Captain Nemo, a madman determined to wreck the world's shipping lanes. Tyrannical, philosophical, Nemo was to become one of the screen's enduring figures, appearing as well in films by other studios and also reprised by Disney in his recent *The Black Hole*, really an uncredited retelling of the Verne story set this time in deep space.

In the years which followed, Disney became an expert in light family live-action comedies, all of which had elements of thievery and chicanery to keep their airy plots going. Several films, however, had impressive mystery backgrounds. *The Moon-Spinners*, in which Hayley Mills plays a British girl vacationing in Greece who becomes involved with missing jewels, is a Hitchcockian drama based on Mary Stewart's book of the same name. Disney went to West Berlin to remake the classic German film, *Emil and the Detectives*, in which a small boy assembles a ragtag band of young pre-teen sleuths to track and trap the crook who has stolen an envelope of money pinned inside his jacket. ("This is a story of crime, just as it happened. . .") *That Darn Cat*, one of the studio's most successful live-action films, based on the Gordons' *Undercover Cat*, tells how the FBI trails a Siamese feline to a bank robbers' lair.

Disney entered television with a daytime daily variety program called *The Mickey Mouse Club*, in which a children's mystery serial became something of a staple. The Hardy Boys were first dramatized on this show, young brothers who against a backdrop of smalltown America confronted such puzzles as "The Mystery of the Applegate Treasure" and "The Mystery of Ghost Lake"—charming, somewhat placid serialized adventures much truer to the age and tempo of the Hardy Boys books than the more recent television adaptation by other hands—in which the brothers are so grown the fiance of one of them is murdered just before their wedding. (One wonders how the Disney Studios, with their special feeling for young heroines, would have handled Nancy Drew.) And *The Wonderful World of Disney*, a weekly prime-time hour, has often featured light-hearted mystery dramas on its roster.

The triumph of Walt Disney is the warmth and universal appeal of his themes and tales, rooted in childhood but eliciting responses from us all. From Maleficent to The Phantom Blot, from Nemo to Zorro, the Disney Studio has offered us the joys of mystery as well.



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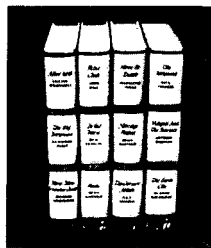
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